

VOL. NO. 1

AMAZING STORIES ANNUAL

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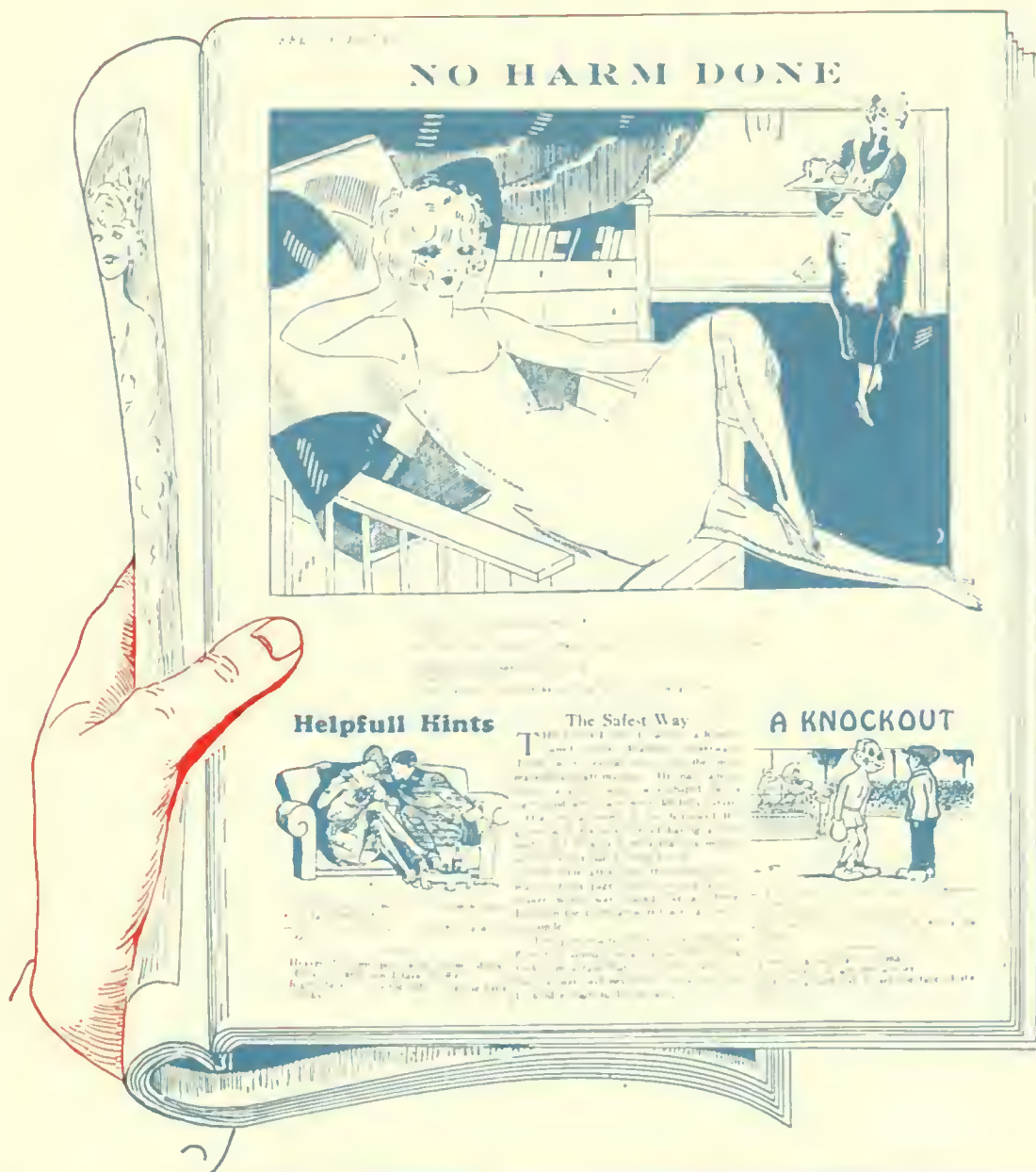


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EDITOR
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AMAZING STORIES ANNUAL

THE
YEAR BOOK
OF
SCIENTIFICTION

THERE has never been presented a more elaborate and thrill-provoking collection of scientific fiction. Included among the famous authors are Edgar Rice Burroughs, author of the famous Martian stories and creator of the Tarzan series; A. Merritt, author of the "Moon Pool," "The People of the Pit," etc.; Murray Leinster well-known author who needs no introduction to AMAZING STORIES readers for the creation of his hero Burl of "The Red Dust," and "The Mad Planet;" H. G. Wells, a writer of international fame, who possesses the virtues of versatility in writing on scientification.

Edgar Rice Burroughs has written many interesting stories, but we believe, for downright originality and exciting interest, "The Master Mind of Mars" is hard to equal. There is hardly a page that does not hold your interest. Once the story gets under way, hair-raising episodes seem to tumble right over each other—they come so quickly. Besides this, the science is excellent and no matter how strangely the tale reads, it always, somehow or other, seems to have an element of truth in it.



EXPERIMENTER PUBLISHING CO.
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Publishers of

RADIO NEWS, SCIENCE & INVENTION, AMAZING STORIES,
RADIO LISTENERS' GUIDE and CALL BOOK, FRENCH HUMOR

AMAZING STORIES ANNUAL

Vol. No. 1

THE
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OF
SCIENTIFICTION

Published by EXPERIMENTER PUB. CO., Inc.

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PREFACE

IN presenting this, the first AMAZING STORIES ANNUAL, to our readers, we take it for granted that you are already a regular reader of AMAZING STORIES. During the year and a half in which AMAZING STORIES has been published we have had a constant demand for copies of AMAZING STORIES which have been out of print. Many readers who did not get some of the copies printed during the first year have written in, but in each case we were unable to furnish such copies, as they had been totally exhausted. In this volume the stories most in demand, and those stories which received the highest number of votes from our readers have been reprinted.

Inasmuch as it would be manifestly unfair to include only reprints of those stories which have been published already, we thought it advisable to include several stories which have not appeared in AMAZING STORIES before. Accordingly we purchased the first publication rights to Edgar Rice Burroughs' new book, "The Master Mind of Mars," which, by the way, is a tremendous story, and which alone far exceeds in value the modest price asked for this book.

Then you will also find another story by the versatile master of scientific fiction, Mr. A. Merritt, whose "The Face in the Abyss" has not been printed in AMAZING STORIES either. A sequel to this story, by the way, is in preparation now and will be published in AMAZING STORIES at a future date.

If you are one of the few who are not already readers of AMAZING STORIES, then this book, will give you an excellent idea of what AMAZING STORIES and Scientific Fiction stand for. In an entirely new field of literature, AMAZING STORIES aims to publish only such stories as arouse the imagination to the highest degree. New issues of AMAZING STORIES magazine, by the way, may be had on all newsstands for 25c on the 5th of each month preceding date of publication. See Page 125.

EDITOR

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The MASTER MIND of MARS

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

Author of "The Land that Time Forgot."



Then he lay a hand upon one of his two swords, but as he drew the weapon, I leaped to my feet, and with such remarkable results that I cannot even now say which was the more surprised, he or I. I must have sailed ten feet into the air and back about twenty feet from where I had

been sitting. Then I was indeed sure that I was upon Mars (not that I had for one instant doubted it.) There could be no doubt of it—I stood upon the soil of The Red Planet—I had come to the world of my dreams—to Barsoom.

A Letter

Helium, June 8th, 1926.

My dear Mr. Burroughs:

It was in the Fall of nineteen seventeen at an officers training camp that I first became acquainted with John Carter, War Lord of Barsoom, through the pages of your novel *A Princess of Mars*. The story made a profound impression upon me and while my better judgment assured me that it was but a highly imaginative piece of fiction a suggestion of the verity of it pervaded my inner consciousness to such an extent that I found myself dreaming of Mars and John Carter, of Dejah Thoris, of Tars Tarkas and of Woola as they had been entities of my own experience rather than the figments of your imagination.

It is true that in those days of strenuous preparation there was little time for dreaming, yet there were brief moments before sleep claimed me at night and there were my dreams. Such dreams! Always of Mars, and during my waking hours at night my eyes always sought out the Red Planet when he was above the horizon and clung there seeking a solution of the seemingly unfathomable riddle he has presented to the Earth man for ages.

Perhaps the thing became an obsession. I know it clung to me all during my training camp days and at night, on the deck of the transport, I would lie on my back gazing up into the red eye of the god of battle—my god—and wishing that, like John Carter, I might be drawn across the great void to the haven of my desire.

And then came the hideous days and nights in the trenches—the rats, the vermin, the mud—with an occasional glorious break in the monotony when we were ordered over the top. I loved it then and loved the bursting shells—the mad, wild chaos of the thundering guns—but the rats and the vermin and the mud—God! how I hated them. It sounds like boasting, I know, and I am sorry; but I wanted to write you just the truth about myself. I think you will understand. And it may account for much that happened afterward.

There came at last to me what had come to so many others upon these bloody fields. It came within the week that I had received my first promotion and my captaincy, of which I was greatly proud, though humbly so, realizing as I did my youth, the great responsibility that it placed upon me as well as the opportunities it offered, not only in service to my country but, in a personal way, to the men of my command. We had advanced a matter of two kilometers and with a small detachment I was holding a very advanced position when I received orders to fall back to the new line. That is the last that I remember until I regained consciousness after dark. A shell must have burst among us. What became of my men I never knew. It was cold and very dark when I awoke and at first, for an instant, I was quite comfortable—before I was fully conscious, I imagine—and then I commenced to feel pain. It grew until it seemed unbearable. It was in

my legs. I reached down to feel of them, but my hand recoiled from what it found and when I tried to move my legs I discovered that I was dead from the waist down. Then the moon came out from behind a cloud and I saw that I lay within a shell hole and that I was not alone—the dead were all about me.

It was a long time before I found the moral courage and the physical strength to draw myself up upon one elbow that I might view the havoc that had been done me. One look was enough—I sank back in an agony of mental and physical anguish—my legs had been blown away from midway between the hips and knees. For some reason I was not bleeding excessively, yet I knew that I had lost a great deal of blood and that I was losing gradually enough more to put me out of my misery in a short time if I were not soon found, and as I lay there on my back, tortured with pain, I prayed that they would not come in time, for I shrank more from the thought of going maimed through life than I shrank from the thought of death; and as I lay there my eyes suddenly focused upon the bright, red eyes of Mars and there surged through me a sudden wave of hope. I stretched out my arms toward Mars, I did not seem to question or to doubt for an instant as I prayed to the god of my vocation to reach forth and succor me. I knew that he would do it—my faith was complete—and yet so great was the mental effort that I made to throw off the hideous bonds of my mutilated flesh, that I felt a momentary qualm of nausea and then a sharp click as of the snapping of a steel wire and suddenly I stood naked

upon two good legs looking down upon the bloody, distorted thing that had been I. Just for an instant did I stand thus before I turned my eyes aloft again to my star of destiny and with outstretched arms stood there in the cold of that French night—waiting.

Suddenly I felt myself drawn with the speed of thought through the trackless wastes of interplanetary space. There was an instant of extreme cold and utter darkness, then—

But the rest is in the manuscript that, with the aid of one greater than either of us, I have found the means to transmit to you with this letter. You and a few others of the chosen will believe in it—for the rest it matters not as yet. The time will come—but why tell you what you already know?

My salutations and my congratulations—the latter on your good fortune in having been chosen as the medium through which Earthmen shall become better acquainted with the manners and customs of Barsoom, against the time that they shall pass through space as easily as John Carter and visit the scenes that he has described to them through you, as have I,

Your sincere friend,

ULYSSES PAXTON,

Late Captain, —th Inf., U. S. Army.

THE MASTER MIND of MARS

By Edgar Rice Burroughs

CHAPTER I.

The House of the Dead



MUST have closed my eyes involuntarily during the transition for when I opened them I was lying flat on my back gazing up into the brilliant, sun-lit sky, while standing a few feet from me and looking down upon me with the most mystified expression was as strange a looking individual as my eyes ever had rested upon. He appeared to be quite an old man, for he was wrinkled and withered beyond description; his limbs were emaciated, his ribs showed distinctly beneath his shrunken hide, his cranium was large and well developed, which, in conjunction with his wasted limbs and torso, lent him the appearance of top-heaviness, as though he had a head beyond all proportion to his body, which was, I am sure, really not the case.

As he stared down upon me through enormous, many lensed spectacles I found the opportunity to examine him as minutely in return. He was, perhaps, five feet five in height, though doubtless he had been taller in youth, since he was somewhat bent; he was naked, except for some rather plain and well worn leathern harness which supported his weapons and pocket pouches and one great ornament, a collar, jewel studded, that he wore around his scraggy neck—such a collar as a dowager empress of pork or real estate might barter her soul for, if she had one. His skin was red, his scant locks gray.

As he looked at me his puzzled expression increased in intensity; he grasped his chin between the thumb and fingers of his left hand and slowly raising his right hand he scratched his head most deliberately. Then he spoke to me, but in a language I did not understand.

At his first words I sat up and shook my head. Then I looked about me. I was seated upon a crimson sward within a high walled enclosure, at least two, and possibly three, sides of which were formed by the outer walls of a structure that in some respects resembled more closely a feudal castle of Europe than any familiar form of architecture that comes to my mind. The facade presented to my view was ornately carved and of most irregular design, the roof line being so broken as to almost suggest a ruin, and yet the whole seemed harmonious and not without beauty. Within the enclosure grew a number of trees and shrubs, all weirdly strange and all, or almost all, profusely flowering. Among them wound walks of colored pebbles among which scintillated what appeared to be rare and beautiful gems, so lovely were the strange, unearthly rays that leaped and played about them in the sunshine.

THE old man spoke again, peremptorily this time, as though repeating a command that had been ignored; again I shook my head. Then he lay a hand upon one of his two swords; but as he drew the weapon I leaped to my feet, and with such remarkable results that I cannot even now say which was the more surprised, he or I. I must have sailed ten feet into the air and back about twenty feet from where I had been sitting, and then I was indeed sure that I was upon Mars (not that I had for one instant doubted it), for the effects of the lesser gravity, the color of the sward and the skin-hue of the red Martians I had seen described in the manuscripts of John Carter, those marvellous and as yet unappreciated contributions to the scientific literature of a world. There could be no doubt of it—I stood upon the soil of The Red Planet—I had come to the world of my dreams—to Barsoom.

So startled was the old man by my agility that he jumped a bit himself, though doubtless involuntarily, but, however, with certain results—his spectacles tumbled from his nose to the sward, and then it was that I discovered that the pitiful old wretch was practically blind when deprived of these artificial aids to vision, for he got to his knees and commenced to grope frantically for the lost glasses, as though his very life depended upon finding them in the instant. Possibly he thought that I might take advantage of his helplessness and slay him. Though the spectacles were enormous and lay within a couple of feet of him he could not find them, his hands, seemingly afflicted by that strange perversity that sometimes confounds our simplest acts, passing all about the lost object of their search, yet never once coming in contact with it.

As I stood watching his futile efforts and considering the advisability of restoring to him the means that would enable him more readily to find my heart with his sword point, I became aware that another had entered the enclosure and looking toward the building I saw a large red-man running rapidly toward the little old man of the spectacles. The newcomer was quite naked, he carried a club in one hand, and there was upon his face such an expression as unquestionably boded ill for the helpless husk of humanity grovelling, mole-like, for its lost spectacles.

My first impulse was to remain neutral in an affair that it seemed could not possibly concern me and of which I had no slightest knowledge upon which to base a predilection toward either of the parties involved, but a second glance at the face of the club-bearer aroused a question as to whether it might not concern me after all, for there was that in the expression upon the man's face that betokened either an inherent savageness of disposition or a maniacal cast of mind which might turn his evidently murderous attentions upon me after he had dispatched his elderly victim, while, in outward appearance, at least, the latter was a sane and relatively harmless individual. It is true that his move to draw his sword against me was not indicative of a friendly disposition toward me, but at least, if there were any choice, he seemed the lesser of two evils.

He was still groping for his spectacles and the naked man was almost upon him as I reached the decision to cast my lot upon the side of the old man. I was twenty feet away, naked and unarmed, but to cover the distance with my Earthly muscles required but an instant and a naked sword lay by the old man's side where he had discarded it the better to search for his spectacles. So it was that I faced the attacker at the instant that he came within striking distance of his victim and that the blow that had been intended for another was aimed at me. This I side-stepped and then I learned that the greater agility of my Earthly muscles had its disadvantages as well as its advantages, for, indeed, I had to learn to fight with a new weapon against a maniac armed with a bludgeon, or at least, I assumed him to be a maniac--it was not strange that I should have done so, what with his frightful show of rage and the terrible expression upon his face.

As I stumbled about endeavoring to accustom myself to the new conditions, I found that, far from offering any serious opposition to my antagonist, I was hard put to it to escape death at his hands. so often did I stumble and fall sprawling upon the scarlet sward, so that the duel from its inception became but a series of efforts,--upon his part to reach and crush me with his great club, and upon mine to dodge and elude him. It was mortifying, but it was the truth. However, this did not last indefinitely, for

presently I learned, and quickly too under the exigencies of the situation, to command my muscles, and then I stood my ground and when he aimed a blow at me, and I had dodged it, I touched him with my point and brought blood along with a savage roar of pain. He went more cautiously then and taking advantage of the change I pressed him so that he fell back. The effect upon me was magical. It gave me new confidence, so that I set upon him in good earnest, thrusting and cutting until I had him bleeding a half dozen places, yet taking good care to avoid his mighty swings any one of which would have felled an ox.

In my attempts to elude him in the beginning of the duel we had crossed the enclosure and were now fighting

at a considerable distance from the point of our first meeting and it now happened that I stood facing toward that point at the moment that the old man regained his spectacles which he quickly adjusted to his eyes. Immediately, he looked about until he discovered us, whereupon he commenced to yell excitedly at us at the same time running rapidly in our direction and drawing his sword as he ran.

The red-man was pressing me hard, but I had gained almost complete control of myself and fearing that I was soon to have two antagonists instead of one I set upon him with redoubled intensity. He missed me by the fraction of an inch, the wind in the wake of his bludgeon fanning my scalp, but he left an opening into which I stepped, running my sword fairly through his heart. At least I thought that I had pierced his heart, but I had forgotten what I had once read in one of John Carter's manuscripts to the effect that all the Martian internal organs are not disposed identically with those of Earth-men. However, the immediate results were quite as satisfactory as though I had found his heart, for the wound was sufficiently grievous to place him *hors de combat*, and at that instant the old gentleman arrived. He found me ready, but I had mistaken his intentions. He made no unfriendly gestures with his weapon, but seemed to be trying to convince me that he had no intention of harming me. He was very excited and apparently tremendously annoyed that I could not understand him, and perplexed, too. He hoped about screaming strange sentences at me that bore the tones of peremptory commands, rabid invective and impotent rage. But the fact that he had returned his sword to its scabbard had greater significance than all his jabbering and when he ceased to yell at me and commenced to talk in a sort of pantomime I realized that he was making overtures of peace if not of friendship, so I lowered my point and bowed. It was all that I could think of to assure him that I had no immediate intention of spitting him.

He seemed satisfied and at once turned his attention to the fallen man. He examined his pulse and listened for his heart, then, nodding his head, he arose and taking a whistle from one of his pocket pouches sounded a single loud blast, whereupon there immediately emerged from

one of the surrounding buildings a score of naked red-men who came running toward us. None was armed. To these he issued a few curt orders, whereupon they gathered the fallen one in their arms and bore him off. Then the old man started toward the building, motioning me to accompany him. There seemed nothing else for me to do but obey. Wherever I might be upon Mars the chances were a million to one that I would be among enemies and so I was as well off here as elsewhere and must depend upon my own resourcefulness, skill and agility to make my way upon the Red Planet.

The old man led me into a small chamber from which opened numerous doors through one of which they were

just bearing my late antagonist. We followed into a large, brilliantly lighted chamber wherein there burst upon my astounded vision the most gruesome scene that I ever had beheld. Rows of tables arranged in parallel lines filled the room and with few exceptions each table bore a similar grisly burden, a partially dismembered or otherwise mutilated human corpse. Above each table was a shelf bearing containers of various sizes and shapes, while from the bot-



...and then she returned the fourth time to the table which bore the figure of the most beautiful creature I had ever looked upon, and stood looking long and earnestly into the dead face..... then she indicated the body with a gesture and nodded assent to the withered keeper of this ghostly exhibit.

oms of the shelves depended numerous surgical instruments, suggesting that my entrance upon Barsoom was to be through a gigantic medical college.

At a word from the old man those who bore the red-man I had wounded laid him upon an empty table and left the apartment, whereupon my host, if so I may call him, for certainly he was not as yet, at least, my captor, motioned me forward and while he conversed in ordinary tones he made two incisions in the body of my late antagonist, one I imagine, in a large vein and one in an artery, to which he deftly attached the ends of two tubes, one of which was connected with an empty glass receptacle and the other with a similar receptacle filled with a colorless, transparent liquid resembling clear water. The connections made the old gentleman pressed a button controlling a small motor, whereupon the victim's blood was pumped into the empty jar while the contents of the other was forced into the emptying veins and arteries.

The tones and gestures of the old man as he addressed me during this operation convinced me that he was explaining in detail the method and purpose of what was transpiring, but as I understood no word of all he said I was as much in the dark when he had completed his discourse as I was before he started it, though what I had seen made it appear reasonable to believe that I was witnessing an ordinary Barsoomian embalming. Having removed the tubes the old man closed the openings he had made by covering them with bits of what appeared a heavy adhesive tape and then motioned me to follow him. We went from room to room in each of which were the same gruesome exhibits and at many of the bodies the old man paused to make a brief examination or to refer to what appeared to be a record of the case that hung upon a hook at the head of each of the tables.

From the last of the chambers we visited upon the first floor my host led me up an inclined runway to the second floor where were rooms similar to those below, but here the tables bore whole rather than mutilated bodies, all of which were patched in various places with adhesive tape. As we were passing among the bodies in one of these rooms a Barsoomian girl, whom I took to be a servant or slave, entered and addressed the old man, whereupon he signed me to follow him and together we descended another runway to the first floor of another building.

Here, in a large, gorgeously decorated and sumptuously furnished apartment an elderly red-woman awaited us. She appeared to be quite old and her face was terribly disfigured as by some injury. Her trappings were magnificent and she was attended by a score of women and armed warriors, suggesting that she was a person of some consequence, but the little old man treated her quite brusquely, as I could see, quite to the horror of her attendants.

Their conversation was lengthy and at the conclusion of it, at the direction of the woman, one of her male escort advanced and opening a pocket pouch at his side withdrew a handful of what appeared to me to be Martian coins. A quantity of these he counted out and handed to the little old man, who then beckoned the woman to follow him, a gesture which included me. Several of her women and guard started to accompany us, but these the old man waved back peremptorily, whereupon there ensued considerable heated discussion between the woman and one of her warriors on one side and the old man on the other, which terminated in his proffering the return of the woman's money with a disgusted air. This seemed to settle the argument, for she refused the coins, spoke briefly to her people and accompanied the old man and myself alone.

He led the way to the second floor and to a chamber which I had not previously visited. It resembled the others closely except that all the bodies therein were of young women, many of them of great beauty. Following closely at the heels of the old man the woman inspected the gruesome exhibit with painstaking care. Thrice she passed slowly among the tables examining their ghastly burdens and each time she paused longest before a certain one which bore the figure of the most beautiful creature I had ever looked upon, and then she returned the fourth time to it and stood looking long and earnestly into the dead face. For a while she stood there talking with the old man, apparently asking innumerable questions, to which he returned quick, brusque replies; then she indicated the body with a gesture and nodded assent to the withered keeper of this ghastly exhibit.

Immediately the old fellow sounded a blast upon his whistle summoning a number of servants to whom he issued brief instructions, after which he led us to another chamber, a smaller one in which were several empty tables similar to those upon which the corpses lay in adjoining rooms. Two female slaves or attendants were in this room and at a word from their master they removed the trappings from the old woman, unloosed her hair and helped her to one of the tables. Here she was thoroughly sprayed with what I presume was an antiseptic solution of some nature, carefully dried and removed to a second table, at a distance of about twenty inches from which stood a second parallel table.

NOW the door of the chamber swung open and two attendants appeared bearing the body of the beautiful girl we had seen in the adjoining room. This they deposited upon the table the old woman had just quitted. As she had been sprayed so the corpse was sprayed; then it was transferred to the table beside that on which she lay. The little old man now made two incisions in the body of the old woman, just as he had in the body of the red-man who

had fallen by my sword; her blood was drawn from her veins and the clear liquid pumped into them, life left her and she lay upon the polished irsite slab that formed the table top, as much a corpse as the poor, beautiful, dead creature at her side.

The little, old man, who had removed the harness down to his waist, and been thoroughly sprayed, now selected a sharp knife from among the instruments above the table and removed the old woman's scalp, following the hair line entirely around her head. In a similar manner he then removed the scalp from the corpse of the young woman, after which, by means of a tiny circular saw attached to the end of a flexible, revolving shaft he sawed through the skull of each, following the line exposed by the removal of the scalps. This and the balance of the marvellous operation was so skillfully performed as to baffle description. Suffice it to say that at the end of four hours he had transferred the brain of each woman to the brain pan of the other, deftly connected the several nerves and ganglia, replaced the skull and scalps and bound both heads securely with his peculiar "adhesive tape," which was not only antiseptic and healing, but anaesthetic, locally, as well.

He now reheated the blood that he had withdrawn from the body of the old woman, adding a few drops of some clear chemical solution, withdrew the liquid from the veins of the beautiful corpse, replacing it with the blood of the old woman and simultaneously administering a hypodermic injection.

During the entire operation he had not spoken a word. Now he issued a few instructions in his curt manner to his assistants, motioned me to follow him, and left the room. He led me to a distant part of the building or series of buildings that composed the whole, ushered me into a luxurious apartment, opened the door to a Barsoomian bath and left me in the hands of trained servants. Refreshed and rested I left the bath after half an hour of relaxation to find harness and trappings awaiting me in the adjoining chamber. Though plain, they were of good material; but there were no weapons with them.

Naturally I had been thinking much upon the strange thing I had witnessed since my advent upon Mars, but what puzzled me most lay in the seemingly inexplicable act of the old woman in paying my host what was evidently a considerable sum to murder her and transfer to the inside of her skull the brain of a corpse. Was it the outcome of some horrible religious fanaticism, or was there an explanation that my Earthly mind could not grasp?

I had reached no decision in the matter when I was summoned to follow a slave to another and nearby apartment where I found my host awaiting me before a table loaded with delicious foods, to which, it is needless to say, I did ample justice after my long fast and longer weeks of rough army fare.

During the meal my host again attempted to converse with me, but, naturally, the effort was fruitless of results. He waxed quite excited at times and upon three distinct occasions laid his hand upon one of his swords when I failed to comprehend what he was saying to me, an action which results in a growing conviction upon my part that he was partially demented; but he evinced sufficient self-control in each instance to avert a catastrophe for one of us.

The meal over, he sat for a long time in deep meditation, then a sudden resolve seemed to possess him, he turned suddenly upon me with a faint suggestion of a smile and dove headlong at once into what was to prove an intensive course of instruction in the Barsoomian language. It was long after dark before he permitted me to retire for the night, conducting me himself to a large apartment, the same in which I had found my new harness. Where he pointed out a pile of rich sleeping silks and furs, bid me

a Barsoomian good-night and left me, locking the door after him upon the outside, to guess whether I were more guest or prisoner.

CHAPTER II.

Preferment

THREE weeks passed. I mastered enough of the Barsoomian tongue to enable me to converse with my host in a reasonably satisfactory manner, and I was progressing slowly in the mastering of the written language of his nation, which was different, of course, from the written language of all other Barsoomian nations, though the spoken language of all is identical. And in these three weeks I had learned much of the strange place in which I was half guest and half prisoner and of my remarkable host-jailer, Ras Thavas, the old surgeon of Toonol, for I had accompanied him almost constantly day after day until gradually there had unfolded before my astounded faculties an understanding of the purposes of the institution over which he ruled and in which he labored practically alone, for the slaves and attendants that served him were but hewers of wood and carriers of water, and it was his brain alone and his skill that directed the sometimes beneficent, the sometimes malevolent, but always marvellous activities of his life's work.

Ras Thavas himself was as remarkable as the things he accomplished. He was never intentionally cruel, he was not, I am sure, intentionally wicked, and yet he was guilty of the most diabolical cruelties and the basest of crimes, though the next moment he might perform a deed that if duplicated upon Earth would have raised him to the highest pinnacle of man's esteem. Yet I know that I am safe in saying that as he was never prompted to a cruel or criminal act by base motives, neither was he ever urged to a humanitarian one by high motives. His was a purely scientific mind entirely devoid of the eloying influences of sentiment, of which he possessed none; his was a practical mind,—evidenced by the enormous fees he demanded for his professional services—yet I know that he would not operate for money alone and I have seen him devote days to the study of a scientific problem, the solution of which could add nothing to his wealth, while the quarters that he furnished his waiting clients were overflowing with wealthy patrons waiting to pour money into his coffers.

His treatment of me was based entirely upon scientific requirements. I offered a problem. I was either, quite evidently, not a Barsoomian at all, or I was of a species of which he had no knowledge. It therefore best suited the purposes of science that I be preserved and studied. I knew much about my own planet—it pleased Ras Thavas' scientific mind to milk me of all I knew in the hope that he might derive some suggestion that would solve one of the Barsoomian scientific riddles that still baffle their savants; but he was compelled to admit that in this respect I was a total loss, not alone because I was densely ignorant upon practically all scientific subjects, but because the learned sciences on Earth have not advanced even to the swaddling-clothes stage as compared with the remarkable progress of corresponding activities on Mars; still he kept me by him, training me in many of the minor duties of his vast laboratory. I was entrusted with the formula of the "embalming fluid" and taught how to withdraw a subject's blood and replace it with this marvellous preservative that arrests decay without altering in the minutest detail the nerve or tissue structure of the body, and I learned also the secret of the few drops of solution which, added to the rewarmed blood before it is returned to the veins of the subject, revitalizes the latter and re-

stores to normal and healthy activity each and every organ of the body.

He told me once why he had permitted me to learn these things that he had kept a secret from all others, and why he kept me with him at all times in preference to any of the numerous individuals of his own race that served him and me in lesser capacities both day and night.

"Vad Varo," he said, using the Barsoomian name that he had given me because he insisted that my own name was meaningless and impractical, "for many years I have needed an assistant, but heretofore I have never felt that I had discovered one who might work here for me wholeheartedly and disinterestedly without ever having reason to go elsewhere or to divulge my secrets to others. You, in all Barsoom, are unique—you have no other friend or acquaintance than myself. Were you to leave me you would find yourself in a world of enemies, for all are suspicious of a stranger. You would not survive a dozen dawns and you would be cold and hungry and miserable—a wretched outcast in a hostile world. Here you have every luxury that the mind of man can devise or the hand of man produce and you are occupied with work of such engrossing interest that your every hour must be fruitful of unparalleled satisfaction. There is no selfish reason, therefore, why you should leave me, yet there is every reason why you should remain. I expect no loyalty other than that which may be prompted by egoism. You make an ideal assistant not only for the reasons I have just given you, but because you are intelligent and quick witted, and now I have decided, after observing you carefully for a sufficient time, that you can serve me in yet another capacity—that of personal body guard.

"You may have noticed that I alone of all those connected with my laboratory am armed. This is unusual upon Barsoom, where people of all classes, and all ages and both sexes habitually go armed. But many of these people I could not trust armed as they would slay me and were I to give my arms to those whom I might trust, who knows but that the others might obtain possession of them and slay me, or even those whom I had trusted turn against me, for there is not a one who might not wish to go forth from this place and return to his own people—only you, Vad Varo; for there is no other place for you to go. And so I have decided to give you weapons. You saved my life once. A similar opportunity might again present itself. I know that, being a reasoning and reasonable creature, you will not slay me, for you have nothing to gain and everything to lose by my death, which would leave you friendless and unprotected in a world of strangers where assassination is the order of society and natural death one of the rarest of phenomena. Here are your arms." He stepped to a cabinet which he unlocked, displaying an assortment of weapons, and selected for me a long-sword, a short-sword, a pistol and a dagger.

"You seem sure of my loyalty, Ras Thavas," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I am only sure that I know perfectly where your interests lie—sentimentalists have words: love, loyalty, friendship, enmity, jealousy, hate, a thousand others; a waste of words—one word defines them all: self-interest. All men of intelligence realize this. They analyze an individual and by his predilections and his needs they classify him as friend or foe, leaving to the weak-minded idiots who like to be deceived, the drooling drivels of sentiment."

I SMILED as I buckled my weapons to my harness, but I held my peace. Nothing could be gained by arguing with the man. Also, I felt quite sure that in any purely academic controversy I should get the worst of it; but many of the matters of which he had spoken had aroused my curiosity and one had reawakened in my mind a matter

to which I had given considerable thought. While partially explained by some of his remarks I still wondered why the red-man from whom I had rescued him had seemed so venomously bent upon slaying him the day of my advent upon Barsoom, and so, as we sat chatting after our evening meal, I asked him.

"A sentimentalist," he said; "a sentimentalist of the most pronounced type. Why that fellow hated me with a venom absolutely unbelievable by any of the reactions of a trained, analytical mind such as mine; but having witnessed his reactions I become cognizant of a state of mind that I cannot of myself even imagine. Consider the facts. He was the victim of assassination—a young warrior in the prime of life, possessing a handsome face and a splendid physique. One of my agents paid his relatives a satisfactory sum for the corpse and brought it to me. It is thus that I obtain practically all of my material. I treated it in the manner with which you are familiar. For a year the body lay in the laboratory, there being no occasion during that time that I had use for it; but eventually a rich client came, a not overly prepossessing man of considerable years. He had fallen desperately in love with a young woman who was attended by many handsome suitors. My client had more money than any of them, more brains, more experience, but he lacked the one thing that each of the others had that always weighs heavily with the undeveloped, unreasoning, sentiment-ridden minds of young females—good looks.

"Now 378—J—493811—P had what my client lacked and could afford to purchase. Quickly we reached an agreement as to price and I transferred the brain of my rich client to the head of 378-J-493811-P and my client went away and for all I know won the hand of the beautiful moron, and 378-J-493811-P might have rested on indefinitely upon his ersite slab until I needed him or a part of him in my work, had I not, merely by chance, selected him for resurgence because of an existing need for another male slave.

"Mind you now, the man had been murdered. He was dead. I bought and paid for the corpse and all there was in it. He might have lain dead forever upon one of my ersite slabs had I not breathed new life into his dead veins. Did he have the brains to view the transaction in a wise and dispassionate manner? He did not. His sentimental reactions caused him to reproach me because I had given him another body, though it seemed to me that, looking at the matter from a standpoint of sentiment, if one must, he should have considered me as a benefactor for having given him life again in a perfectly healthy, if somewhat used, body.

"He had spoken to me upon the subject several times, begging me to restore his body to him, a thing which, of course, as I explained to him, was utterly out of the question unless chance happened to bring the corpse of the client who had purchased his carcass to my laboratory—a contingency quite beyond the pale of possibility for one as wealthy as my client. The fellow even suggested that I permit him to go forth and assassinate my client, bringing the body back that I might reverse the operation and restore his body to his brain. When I refused to divulge the name of the present possessor of his body he grew sulky, but until the very hour of your arrival, when he attacked me, I did not suspect the depth of his hate complex. Sentiment is indeed a bar to all progress. We of Toonol are probably less subject to its vagaries than most other nations upon Barsoom, but yet most of my fellow countrymen are victims of it in varying degrees. It has its rewards and compensations, however. Without it we could preserve no stable form of government and the Phundahlans, or some other people, would overrun and conquer us; but enough of our lower classes have senti-

ment to a sufficient degree to give them loyalty to the Jeddak of Toonol and the upper classes are brainy enough to know that it is to their own best interests to keep him upon his throne.

"The Phundahlans, upon the other hand, are egregious sentimentalist, filled with crass stupidities and superstitions, slaves to every variety of brain withering conceit. Why the very fact that they keep the old termagant, Xaxa, on the throne brands them with their stupid idiocy. She is an ignorant, arrogant, selfish, stupid, cruel, virago, yet the Phundahlans would fight and die for her because her father was Jeddak of Phundahl. She taxes them until they can scarce stagger beneath their burden, she misrules them, exploits them, betrays them, and they fall down and worship at her feet. Why? Because her father was Jeddak of Phundahl and his father before him and so on back into antiquity; because they are ruled by sentiment rather than reason; because their wicked rulers play upon this sentiment.

"She had nothing to recommend her to a sane person—not even beauty. You know, you saw her."

"I saw her?" I demanded.

"You assisted me the day that we gave her old brain a new casket—the day you arrived from what you call your Earth."

"She! That old woman was Jeddara of Phundahl?"

"That was Xaxa," he assured me.

"Why, you did not accord her the treatment that one of the Earth might suppose would be accorded a ruler, and so I had no idea that she was more than a rich old woman."

"I am Ras Thavas," said the old man. "Why should I incline the head to any other? In my world nothing counts but brain and in that respect, and without egotism, I may say that I acknowledge no superior."

"Then you are not without sentiment," I said, smiling. "You acknowledge pride in your intellect!"

"It is not pride," he said, patiently, for him; "it is merely a fact that I state. A fact that I should have no difficulty in proving. In all probability I have the most highly developed and perfectly functioning mind among all of the learned men of my acquaintance, and reason indicates that this fact also suggests that I possess the most highly developed and perfectly functioning mind upon Barsoom. From what I know of Earth and what I have seen of you I am convinced that there is no mind upon your planet that may even faintly approximate in power that which I have developed during a thousand years of active study and research. Rasoom or Casoom (Mercury or Venus) may possibly support intelligences equal to or even greater than mine. While we have made some study of their thought waves, our instruments are not yet sufficiently developed to more than suggest that they are of extreme refinement, power and flexibility."

"And what of the girl whose body you gave to the Jeddara?" I asked, irrelevantly, for my mind could not efface the memory of that sweet body that must, indeed, have possessed an equally sweet and fine brain.

"Merely a subject! Merely a subject!" he replied with a wave of his hand.

"What will become of her?" I insisted.

"What difference does it make?" he demanded. "I bought her with a batch of prisoners of war. I do not even recall from what country my agent obtained them, or from whence they originated. Such matters are of no import."

"She was alive when you bought her?" I demanded.

"Yes. Why?"

"You—er—ah—killed her then after you purchased her?"

That was some ten years ago. Why should I permit her to grow old and wrinkled? She should no longer

have the same value then, would she? No. I preserved her. When Xaxa bought her she was just as fresh and young as the day she arrived. I kept her a long time. Many women looked at her and wanted her face and figure, but it took a Jeddara to afford her. She brought the highest price that I have ever been paid. Yes, I kept her a long time, but I knew that some day she would bring my price. She was indeed beautiful and so sentiment has its uses—were it not for sentiment there would be no fools to support this work that I am doing, and thus permit me to carry on investigations of far greater merit. You would be surprised, I know, were I to tell you that I feel that I am almost on the point of being able to reproduce rational human beings through the action upon certain chemical combinations of a group of rays probably entirely undiscovered by your scientists, if I am to judge by the paucity of your knowledge concerning such things."

"I would not be surprised," I assured him. "I would not be surprised at anything that you might accomplish."

CHAPTER III.

Valla Dia

I LAY awake that night thinking of 4296-E-2631-H, the beautiful girl whose perfect body had been stolen to furnish a gorgeous setting for the cruel brain of a tyrant. It seemed a horrid crime and I could not rid my mind of it. I think that the contemplation of it sowed the first seed of my hatred and loathing for Ras Thavas. I could not conjure a creature so utterly devoid of bowels of compassion as to even consider for a moment the frightful ravishing of that sweet and lovely body for even the holiest of purposes, much less one that could have been induced to do so for filthy pelf.

So much did I think upon the girl that night that her image was the first to impinge upon my returning consciousness at dawn, and after I had eaten, Ras Thavas not having appeared, I went directly to the storage room where the poor thing lay. Here she lay, identified only by a small panel, bearing a number: 4296-E-2631-H. The body of an old woman with a disfigured face lay before me in the rigid immobility of death and yet that was not the figure that I saw, but, instead, a vision of radiant loveliness whose imprisoned soul lay dormant beneath those greying looks. The creature here with the face and form of Xaxa was not Xaxa at all for all that made the other what she was had been transferred to this cold corpse. How frightful would be the awakening, should awakening ever come! I shuddered to think of the horror that must overwhelm the girl when first she realized the horrid crime that had been perpetrated upon her. Who was she? What story lay locked in that dead and silent brain? What loves must have been hers whose beauty was so great and upon whose fair face had lain the indelible imprint of graciousness! Would Ras Thavas ever arouse her from this happy semblance of death?—far happier than any awakening ever could be for her. I shrank from the thought of her awakening and yet I longed to hear her speak, to know that that brain lived again, to learn her name, to listen to the story of this gentle life that had been so rudely snatched from its proper environment and so cruelly bandied by the hand of Fate. And suppose she were awakened! Suppose she were awakened and that I—. A hand was laid upon my shoulder and I turned to look into the face of Ras Thavas.

"You seem interested in this subject," he said.

"I was wondering," I replied, "what the reaction of this girl's brain would be were she to awaken to the discovery that she had become an old, disfigured woman."

He stroked his chin and eyed me narrowly. "An interesting experiment," he mused. "I am gratified to discover that you are taking a scientific interest in the labors that I am carrying on. The psychological phases of my work I have, I must confess, rather neglected during the past hundred years or so, though I formerly gave them a great deal of attention. It would be interesting to observe and study several of these cases. This one, especially, might prove of value to you as an initial study, it being simple and regular. Later we will let you examine into a case where a man's brain had been transferred to a woman's skull, and a woman's brain to a man's; there are also the interesting cases where a portion of diseased or injured brain has been replaced by a portion of the brain from another subject; and, for experimental purposes alone, those human brains that have been transplanted to the craniums of beasts, and *vice versa*, offer tremendous opportunities for observation. I have in mind one case in which I transferred half the brain of an ape to the skull of a man, after having removed half of his brain, which I grafted upon the remaining part of the brain in the ape's skull. That was a matter of several years ago and I have often thought that I should like to recall these two subjects and note the results. I shall have to have a look at them—as I recall it they are in vault L-42-X, beneath building 4-J-21. We shall have to have a look at them some day soon—it has been years since I have been below; there must be some very interesting specimens there that have escaped my mind. But come! let us recall 4296-E-2631-H."

"No!" I exclaimed, laying a hand upon his arm. "It would be horrible."

He turned a surprised look upon me and then a nasty, sneering smile curled his lip. "Maudlin, sentimental fool!" he cried. "Who dare say no to me?"

I laid a hand upon the hilt of my long-sword and looked him steadily in the eye. "Ras Thavas," I said, "you are master in your own house; but while I am your guest treat me with courtesy."

He returned my look for a moment but his eyes wavered. "I was hasty," he said; "let it pass." I let that answer for an apology—really it was more than I had expected; but the event was not unfortunate. I think he treated me with far greater respect thereafter; but now he turned immediately to the slab bearing the mortal remains of 4296-E-2631-H.

"Prepare the subject for revivification," he said, "and make what study you can of all its reactions." With that he left the room.

I was now fairly adept at this work which I set about with some misgivings but with the assurance that I was doing right in obeying Ras Thavas while I remained a member of his entourage. The blood that had once flowed through the veins of the beautiful body that Ras Thavas had sold to Xaxa reposed in an hermetically sealed vessel upon the shelf above the corpse. As I had before done in other cases beneath the watchful eyes of the old surgeon I now did for the first time alone. The blood heated, the incisions made, the tubes attached and the few drops of life-giving solution added to the blood I was now ready to restore life to that delicate brain that had lain dead for ten years. As my finger rested upon the little button that actuated the motor that was to send the revivifying liquid into those dormant veins I experienced such a sensation as I imagine no mortal man ever has felt before. I had become master of life and death and yet at this moment that I stood there upon the point of resurrecting the dead I felt more like a murderer than a savior. I tried to view the procedure dispassionately through the cold eye of science, but I failed miserably. I could only see a stricken girl grieving for her lost beauties.

WITH a muffled oath I turned away—I could not do it! And then, as though an outside force had seized upon me, my finger moved unerringly to the button and pressed it. I cannot explain it, except upon the theory of dual mentality, which may explain many things. Perhaps my subjective mind directed the act. I do not know. I only know that I did it, the motor started, the level of the blood in the container commenced immediately to lower gradually.

Spell-bound, I stood watching. Presently the vessel was empty. I shut off the motor, removed the tubes, sealed the openings with tape. The red glow of life tinged the body, replacing the sallow, purplish hue of death. The breasts rose and fell regularly, the head turned slightly and the eyelids moved. A faint sigh issued from between the parting lips. For a long time there was no other sign of life, then, quite suddenly, the eyes opened. They were dull at first, but presently they commenced to fill with questioning wonderment. They rested on me and then passed on about that portion of the room that was visible from the position of the body. Then they came back to me and remained steadily fixed upon my countenance after having once surveyed me from top to toe. There was still the questioning in them, but there was no fear.

"Where am I?" she asked. The voice was that of an old woman—high and harsh. A startled expression filled her eyes. "What is the matter with me? What is wrong with my voice? What has happened?"

I laid a hand upon her forehead. "Don't bother about it now," I said, soothingly. "Wait until you are stronger. Then I will tell you."

She sat up. "I am strong," she said, and then her eyes swept her lower body and limbs and a look of utter horror crossed her face. "What has happened to me? In the name of my first ancestor, what has happened to me?"

The shrill, harsh voice grated upon me. It was the voice of Xaxa and Xaxa now must possess the sweet musical tones that alone would have harmonized with the beautiful face she had stolen. I tried to forget those strident notes and think only of the pulchritude of the envelope that had once graced the soul within this old and withered carcass.

She extended a hand and laid it gently upon mine. The act was beautiful, the movements graceful. The brain of the girl directed the muscles, but the old, rough vocal chords of Xaxa could give forth no sweeter notes. "Tell me, please!" she begged. There were tears in the old eyes, I'll venture for the first time in many years. "Tell me! You do not seem unkind."

And so I told her. She listened intently and when I was through she sighed. "After all," she said, "it is not so dreadful, now that I really know. It is better than being dead." That made me glad that I had pressed the button. She was glad to be alive, even draped in the hideous carcass of Xaxa. I said as much.

"You were so beautiful," I said.

"And now I am so ugly?" I made no answer. "After all, what difference does it make?" she inquired presently. "This old body cannot change me, or make me different from what I have always been. The good in me and whatever of sweetness and kindness remains and I can be happy to be alive and perhaps do some good. I was terrified at first, because I did not know what had happened to me. I thought that maybe I had contracted some terrible disease that had so altered me—that horrified me; but now that I know—pouf! what of it?"

"You are wonderful," I said. "Most women would have gone mad with the horror and grief of it—to lose such wondrous beauty as was yours—and you do not care."

"Oh, yes, I care, my friend," she corrected me; "but I do not care enough to ruin my life in all other respects because of it, or to cast a shadow upon the lives of those

around me. I have had my beauty and enjoyed it. It is not an unalloyed happiness I can assure you. Men killed one another because of it, two great nations went to war because of it, and perhaps my father lost his throne or his life—I do not know, for I was captured by the enemy while the war still raged. It may be raging yet and men dying because I was too beautiful. No one will fight for me now, though," she added, with a rueful smile.

"Do you know how long you have been here?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "It was day before yesterday that they brought me hither."

"It was ten years ago," I told her.

"Ten years! Impossible."

I pointed to the corpses around us. "You have lain like this for ten years," I explained. "There are subjects here who have lain thus for fifty, Ras Thavas tells me."

"Ten years! Ten years! What may not have happened in ten years! It is better thus. I should fear to go back now. I should not want to know that my father, my mother too, perhaps, are gone. It is better thus. Perhaps you will let me sleep again? May I not?"

"That remains with Ras Thavas," I replied; "but for a while I am to observe you."

"Observe me?"

"Study you—your reactions."

"Ah! and what good will that do?"

"It may do some good in the world."

"It may give this horrid Ras Thavas some new ideas for his torture chamber—some new scheme for coining money from the suffering of his victims," she said, her harsh voice saddened.

"Some of his works are good," I told her. "The money he makes permits him to maintain this wonderful establishment where he constantly carries on countless experiments. Many of his operations are beneficent. Yesterday a warrior was brought in whose arm was crushed beyond repair. Ras Thavas gave him a new arm. A demented child was brought. Ras Thavas gave her a new brain. The arm and the brain were taken from two who had met violent deaths. Through Ras Thavas they were permitted, after death, to give life and happiness to others."

She thought for a moment. "I am content," she said. "I only hope that you will always be the observer."

Presently Ras Thavas came and examined her. "A good subject," he said. He looked at the chart where I had made a very brief record following the other entries relative to the history of Case No. 4296-E-2631-H. Of course this is, naturally, a rather free translation of this particular identification number. The Barsoomians have no alphabet such as ours and their numbering system is quite different. The thirteen characters above were represented by four Toonolian characters, yet the meaning was quite the same—they represented, in contracted form, the case, number, the room, the table and the building. "The subject will be quartered near you where you may regularly observe it," continued Ras Thavas. "There is a chamber adjoining yours. I will see that it is unlocked. Take the subject there. When not under your observation, lock it in." It was only another case to him.

I took the girl, if I may so call her, to her quarters and on the way I asked her her name, for it seemed to me an unnecessary discourtesy always to address her and refer to her as 4296-E-2631-H, and this I explained to her.

"It is considerate of you to think of that," she said, "but really that is all that I am here—just another subject for vivisection."

"You are more than that to me," I told her; "you are friendless and helpless. I want to be of service to you—to make your lot more easy if I can."

"Thank you again," she said; "my name is Valla Dia, and yours?"

"Ras Thavas calls me Vad Varo," I told her.

"But that is not your name?"

"My name is Ulysses Paxton."

"It is a strange name, unlike any that I have ever heard, but you are unlike any man I have ever seen—you do not seem Barsoomian. Your color is unlike that of any race."

"I am not of Barsoom, but from Earth, the planet you sometimes call Jasoom. That is why I differ in appearance from any one you have known before."

"Jasoom! There is another Jasoomian here whose fame has reached to the remotest corners of Barsoom, but I never have seen him."

"John Carter?" I asked.

"Yes, The Warlord. He was of Helium and my people were not friendly with those of Helium. I never could understand how he came here. And now there is another from Jasoom—how can it be? How did you cross the great void?"

I shook my head.

"I cannot even guess," I told her.

"Jasoom must be peopled with wonderful men," she said. It was a pretty compliment.

"As Barsoom is with beautiful women," I replied.

She glanced down ruefully at her old and wrinkled body.

"I have seen the real of you," I said gently.

"I hate to think of my face," she said; "I know it is a frightful thing."

"It is not you, remember that when you see it and do not feel too badly."

"It is as bad as that?" she asked.

I did not reply. "Never mind," she said presently; "if I had not beauty of the soul, I was not beautiful, no matter how perfect my features may have been; but if I possessed beauty of soul then I have it now, and so I can think beautiful thoughts and perform beautiful deeds and that, I think, is the real test of beauty, after all."

"And there is hope," I added, almost in a whisper.

"Hope? No, there is no hope, if what you mean to suggest is that I may some time regain my lost self. You have told me enough to convince me that that can never be."

"We will not speak of it," I said; "but we may think of it and sometimes thinking a great deal of a thing helps us to find a way to get it, if we want it badly enough."

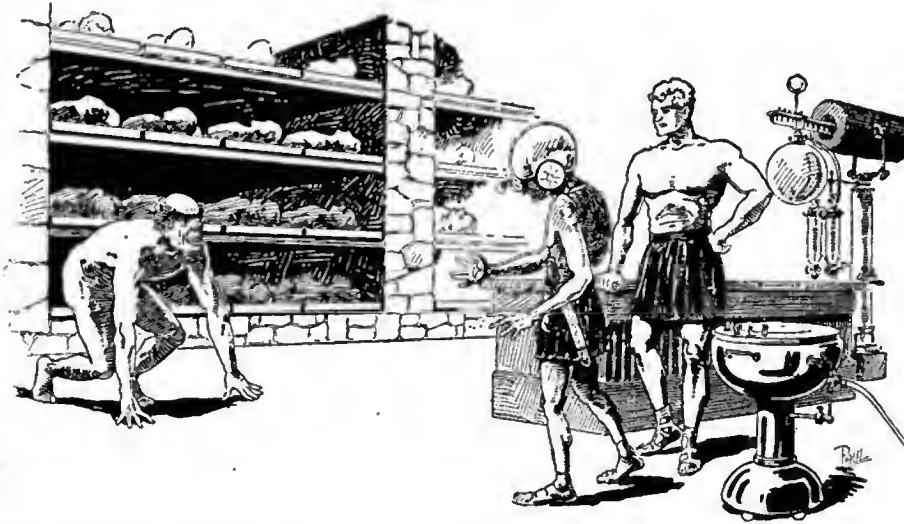
"I do not want to hope," she said, "for it will but mean disappointment for me. I shall be happy as I am. Hoping, I should always be unhappy."

I had ordered food for her and after it was brought Ras Thavas sent for me and I left her, locking the door of her chamber as the old surgeon had instructed. I found Ras Thavas in his office, a small room which adjoined a very large one in which were a score of clerks arranging and classifying reports from various departments of the great laboratory. He arose as I entered.

"Come with me, Vad Varo," he directed, "we will have a look at the two cases in L-42-X—the two of which I spoke."

"The man with half a simian brain and the ape with a half human brain?" I asked.

He nodded and preceded me toward the runway that led to the vaults beneath the building. As we descended the corridors and passageways indicated long disuse. The floors were covered with an impalpable dust, long undisturbed; the tiny radium bulbs that faintly illuminated the sub-barsoomian depths were likewise coated. As we proceeded we passed many doorways on either side, each marked with its descriptive hieroglyphic. Several of the openings had been tightly sealed with masonry. What gruesome secrets were hidden within? At last we came to L-42. Here the bodies were arranged on shelves, several rows of which almost completely filled the room from floor to ceiling, except for a rectangular space in the center of the chamber, which accommodated an ersite topped operating table with its array of surgical instruments, its motor and other laboratory equipment.



RAS THAVAS searched out the subject of his strange experiment; together we carried the human body first to the table and while Ras Thavas attached the tubes I returned for the vessel of blood which reposed upon the same shelf beside the corpse. The now familiar method of revivification was soon accomplished and presently we were watching the return to consciousness of this

particular subject.

The man sat up and looked at us, then he cast a quick glance about the chamber; there was a savage light in his eyes as they returned to us. Slowly he backed from the table to the floor, keeping the former between us.

"We will not harm you," said Ras Thavas.

The man attempted to reply, but his words were unintelligible gibberish; then he shook his head and growled. Ras Thavas took a step toward him and the man dropped to all fours, his knuckles resting on the floor, and backed away, growling.

"Come!" cried Ras Thavas; "we will not harm you," and again he attempted to approach the subject; but the man only backed quickly away, growling more fiercely, and then suddenly he wheeled and climbed quickly to the top of the highest shelf, where he squatted upon a corpse and gibbered at us.

"We shall have to have help," said Ras Thavas and, going to the doorway, he blew a signal upon his whistle.

"What are you blowing that for?" demanded the man suddenly. "Who are you? What am I doing here? What has happened to me?"

"Come down," said Ras Thavas. "We are friends."

Slowly the man descended to the floor and came toward us, but he still moved with his knuckles to the pavement. He looked about at the corpses and a new light entered his eyes.

"I am hungry!" he cried. "I will eat!" and with that he seized the nearest corpse and dragged it to the floor.

"Stop! Stop" cried Ras Thavas, leaping forward. "You will ruin the subject," but the man only backed away, dragging the corpse along the floor with him. It was then that the attendants came and with their help we subdued and bound the poor creature. Then Ras Thavas had the attendants bring the body of the ape and he told them to remain, as we might need them.

The subject was a large specimen of the Barsoomian white ape, one of the most savage and fearsome denizens of the Red Planet and because of the creature's great strength and ferocity Ras Thavas took the precaution to see that it was securely bound before resurgence.

With returning consciousness the creature eyed us questioningly. Several times it seemed to essay to speak, but only inarticulate sounds issued from its throat. Then it lay still for a period.

Ras Thavas spoke to it. "If you understand my words," he said; "nod your head." The creature nodded.

"Would you like to be freed of your bonds?" asked the surgeon.

Again the creature nodded an affirmative.

"I fear that you will attempt to injure us or escape," said Ras Thavas.

The ape was apparently trying very hard to articulate and at last there issued from its lips a sound that could not be misunderstood. It was the single word "no."

"You will not harm us or try to escape?" Ras Thavas repeated his question.

"No," said the ape, and this time the word was clearly enunciated.

"We shall see," said Ras Thavas; "but remember that with our weapons we may dispatch you quickly if you attack us."

The ape nodded, and then, very laboriously: "I will not harm you."

At a sign from Ras Thavas the attendants removed the boards and the creature sat up. It stretched its limbs and slid easily to the floor, where it stood erect upon two feet. This was not surprising, since the white ape goes more often upon two feet than four, a fact of which I was not cognizant at the time, but which Ras Thavas explained to me later in commenting upon the fact that the human subject had gone upon all fours, which, to Ras Thavas, indicated a reversion to type in the fractional ape-brain transplanted to the human skull.

Ras Thavas examined the subject at considerable length and then resumed his examination of the human subject which continued to evince more simian characteristics than human, though it spoke rather more easily than the ape, undoubtedly, because of its more perfect vocal organs. It was only by exerting the closest attention that the diction of the ape became understandable at all.

"There is nothing remarkable about these subjects," said Ras Thavas, after devoting half a day to them. "They bear out what I had already determined years ago in the transplanting of entire brains; that the act of transplanting stimulates growth and activity of brain cells. You will note that in each subject the transplanted portions of the brain are more active — they, in a considerable measure, control. That is why we have the human subject displaying distinctly simian characteristics, while the ape behaves in a more human manner, though if longer and closer observations were desirable you would doubtless find that each reverted at times to his own nature — that is, the ape would be more wholly an ape and the human more manlike; but it is not worth the time. I have already given too much time to a rather unprofitable forenoon. I shall leave you now to restore the subjects to anesthesia while I return to the laboratories above. The attendants will remain here to assist you, if required."

The ape, who had been an interested listener, now stepped forward. "Oh, please, I pray you," it mumbled, "do not again condemn me to these horrid shelves. I recall the day that I was brought here securely bound, and though I have no recollection of what has transpired since I can but guess from the appearance of my skin and that of these dusty corpses that I have lain here long. I beg that you will permit me to live and either restore me to my fellows or allow me to serve in some capacity in this establishment of which I saw something between the time of my capture and the day that I was carried, bound and helpless, to one of your cold, ersite slabs."

Ras Thavas made a gesture of impatience. "Nonsense!" he cried. "You are better off here, where you can be preserved in the interests of science."

"Accede to his request," I begged, "and I will myself take over all responsibility for him while I profit by the study that he will afford me."

"Do as you are directed," snapped Ras Thavas and he quit the room.

I shrugged my shoulders. "There is nothing for it, then," I said.

"I might dispatch you all and escape," mused the ape, aloud; "but you would have helped me. I could not kill one who would have befriended me — yet I shrink from the thought of another death. How long have I lain here?" he demanded suddenly.

I referred to the history of his case that had been brought and suspended at the head of the table. "Twelve years," I told him.

"And yet, why not?" he demanded of himself. "This man would slay me—why should not I slay him first?"

"It would do you no good," I assured him, "for you could never escape; instead you would be really killed, dying a death from which Ras Thavas would probably think it not worthwhile ever to recall you, while I, who might find the opportunity at some later date and who have the inclination, would be dead at your hands and thus incapable of saving you."

I had been speaking in a low voice, close to his ear, that the attendants might not overhear me. The ape listened intently.

"You will do as you suggest?" he asked.

"At the first opportunity that presents itself," I assured him.

"Very well," he said, "I will submit, trusting to you."

A half hour later both subjects had been returned to their shelves.

CHAPTER IV

The Compact

DAYS ran into weeks, weeks into months, as I labored at the side of Ras Thavas and more and more the old surgeon took me into his confidence, more and more he imparted to me the secrets of his skill and his profession. Gradually he permitted me to perform more and more important functions in the actual practice of his vast laboratory. I started transferring limbs from one subject to another, the internal organs of the digestive tract. Then he entrusted me with several operations upon paying clients. I removed the kidneys from a rich old man, replacing them with healthy ones from a young subject; I gave a stunted child new thyroid glands the following day. A week later I transferred two hearts and then, at last, came the great day for me — unassisted, with Ras Thavas standing silently beside me, I took the brain of an old man and transplanted it within the cranium of a youth.

When I had done Ras Thavas laid a hand upon my shoulder. "I could not have done better myself," he said.

He seemed much elated and I could not but wonder at this unusual demonstration of emotion upon his part, who so prided himself upon his lack of emotionalism. I had often pondered the purpose which influenced Ras Thavas to devote so much time to my training, but never had I hit upon any more satisfactory explanation than that he had need of assistance in his growing practice; yet when I consulted the records, that were now open to me, I discovered that his practice was no greater now than it had been for many years, and even had it been there was really no reason why he should have trained me in preference to one of his red-Martian assistants, his belief in my loyalty not being sufficient warrant, in my mind, for this preferment when he could, as well as not, have kept me for a body-guard and trained one of his own kind to aid him in his surgical work.

But I was presently to learn that he had an excellent reason for what he was doing — Ras Thavas always had an excellent reason for whatever he did — for one night after we had finished our evening meal he sat looking at me intently as he so often did, as though he would read my mind, which, by the way, he was totally unable to do, much to his surprise and chagrin, for unless a Martian is constantly upon the alert any other Martian can read clearly his every thought; but Ras Thavas was unable to read mine. He said that it was due to the fact that I was not a Barsoomian. Yet I could often read the minds of his assistants, when they were off their guard, though never had I read aught of Ras Thavas' thoughts, nor, I am sure, had any other read them, for he kept his brain sealed like one of his own blood jars, and he was never for a moment found with his barriers down.

He sat looking at me this evening for a long time, nor did it in the least embarrass me, so accustomed was I to his peculiarities. "Perhaps," he said, presently, "one of the reasons that I trust you is due to the fact that I cannot ever, at any time, fathom your mind, so, if you harbor traitorous thoughts concerning me I do not know it, while others, every one of them, reveal their inmost souls to my searching mind and in each one there is envy, jealousy and hatred for me. Them, I know, I cannot trust, therefore I must accept the risk and place all my dependence upon you, and my reason tells me that my choice is a wise one — I have told you upon what grounds I based my selection of you as my body guard. The same holds true in my selection of you for the thing I have in mind. You cannot harm me without harming yourself and no man will intentionally do that; nor is there any reason why you should feel any deep antagonism toward me. You are, of course, a sentimentalist and doubtless you look with horror upon many of the acts of a sane, rational, scientific mind; but you are also highly intelligent and can, therefore, appreciate better than another, even though you may not approve them, the motives that prompt me to do many of those things of which your sentimentality disapproves. I may have offended you, but I have never wronged you, nor have I wronged any creature for which you might have felt some of your so-called friendship or love. Are my premises incorrect, or my reasoning faulty?

I assured him to the contrary.

"Very well! Now let me explain why I have gone to such pains to train you as no other human being, aside from myself, has ever been trained. I am not ready to use you yet, or rather you are not ready; but if you know my purpose you will realize the necessity for bending your every energy to the consummation of my purpose and to that end you will strive even more diligently than you have to perfect yourself in the high, scientific art I am imparting to you.

"I am a very old man," he continued after a brief pause, "even as age goes upon Barsoom. I am over a thousand

years of age. I have passed the allotted natural span of life, but I am not through with my life's work—I have but barely started it. I must not die. Barsoom must not be robbed of this wondrous brain and skill of mine. I have long had in mind a plan to thwart death, but it required another with skill equal to mine—two such might live forever. I have selected you to be that other, for reasons that I already have explained—they are undefiled by sentimentalism. I do not choose you because I love you, or because I feel friendship for you, or because I think that you love me, or feel friendship toward me—I choose you because I know that of all the inhabitants of this world you are the one least likely to fail me. For a time you will have my life in your hands. You will understand now why I have not been able to choose carelessly.

"This plan that I have chosen is simplicity itself provided that I can count upon just two essential factors—skill and self-interested loyalty in an assistant. My body is about worn out—I must have a new one. My laboratory is filled with wonderful bodies, young and filled with potential strength and health. I have but to select one of these and have my skilled assistant transfer my brain from this old carcass to the new one." He paused.

"I UNDERSTAND now, why you have trained me," I said — "it has puzzled me greatly."

"Thus and thus only may I continue my labors," he went on, "and thus may Barsoom be assured a continuance, practically indefinitely, of the benefits that my brain may bestow upon her children. I may live forever, provided I always have a skilled assistant, and I may assure myself of such by seeing to it that he never dies—when he wears out one organ, or his whole body I can replace either from my great storehouse of perfect parts, and for me he can perform the same service. Thus may we continue to live indefinitely, for the brain, I believe, is almost deathless, unless injured or attacked by disease. You are not ready as yet to intrust with this important task—you must transfer many more brains and meet with and overcome the various irregularities and idiosyncrasies that constitute the never failing differences that render no two operations identical. When you gain sufficient proficiency I shall be the first to know it and then we shall lose no time in making Barsoom safe for posterity."

The old man was far from achieving hatred of himself. However, his plan was an excellent one, both for himself and for me. It assured us immortality—we might live forever and always with strong, healthy, young bodies. The outlook was alluring—and what a wonderful position it placed me in. If the old man could be assured of my loyalty because of self-interest, similarly might I depend upon his loyalty, for he could not afford to antagonize the one creature in the world who could assure him immortality, or withhold it from him. For the first time since I had entered his establishment I felt safe.

As soon as I had left him I went directly to Valla Dia's apartment, for I wanted to tell her this wonderful news. In the weeks that had passed since her resurrection I had seen much of her and in our daily intercourse there had been revealed to me little by little the wondrous beauties of her soul, until at last I no longer saw the hideous, disfigured face of Xaxa when I looked upon her, but the eyes of my heart penetrated deeper to the loveliness that lay within that sweet mind. She had become my confidant, as I was hers, and this association constituted the one great pleasure of my existence upon Barsoom.

Her congratulations, when I told her of what had come to me, were very sincere and lovely. She said that she hoped I would use this great power of mine to do good in the world and I assured her that I would and that among the first things that I should demand of Ras Thavas was

that he should give Valla Dia a new and beautiful body, but she shook her head.

"No, my friend," she said, "if I may not have my own body this old one of Xaxa's is quite as good for me as another. Without my own body I should not care to return to my native country, while were Ras Thavas to give me the beautiful body of another I should always be in danger of the covetousness of his clients, any one of whom might see and desire to purchase it leaving to me his old husk; conceivably one quite terribly diseased or maimed. No, my friend, I am satisfied with the body of Xaxa, unless I may again possess my own, for Xaxa at least bequeathed me a tough and healthy envelope, however ugly it may be; and for what do looks count here? You, alone, are my friend—that I have your friendship is enough. You admire me for what I am, not for what I look like, so let us leave well enough alone."

"If you could regain your own body and return to your native country, you would like that?" I demanded.

"Oh, do not say it!" she cried. "The simple thought of it drives me mad with longing. I must not harbor so hopeless a dream that at best may only tantalize me into greater abhorrence of my lot."

"Do not say that it is hopeless," I urged; "death, only, renders hope futile."

"You mean to be kind," she said; "but you are only hurting me. There can be no hope."

"May I hope for you, then?" I asked; "for I surely see a way, however slight a possibility for success it may have; still, it is a way."

She shook her head. "There is no way," she said, with finality; "no more will Duhor know me."

"Duhor?" I repeated. "You—some one you care for very much?"

"I care for Duhor very much," she answered with a smile; "but Duhor is not someone—Duhor is my home, the country of my ancestors."

"How came you to leave Duhor?" I asked; "you have never told me, Valla Dia."

"It was because of the ruthlessness of Jal Had, Prince of Amhor," she replied. "Hereditary enemies were Duhor and Amhor, but Jal Had came disguised into the city of Duhor, having heard, they say, of the great beauty attributed to the only daughter of Kor San, Jeddak of Duhor, and when he had seen her he determined to possess her. Returning to Amhor he sent ambassadors to the court of Kor San to sue for the hand of the Princess of Duhor; but Kor San, who had no son, had determined to wed his daughter to one of his own Jeds that the son of this union, with the blood of Kor San in his veins, might rule over the people of Duhor, and so the offer of Jal Had was declined."

"This so incensed the Amhorian that he equipped a great fleet and set forth to conquer Duhor and take by force that which he could not win by honorable methods. Duhor was, at that time, at war with Helium and all her forces were far afield in the south, with the exception of a small army that had been left behind to guard the city.

Jal Had, therefore, could not have selected a more propitious time for an attack. Duhor fell, and while his troops were looting the fair city Jal Had, with a picked force, sacked the place of the jeddak and searched for the princess; but the princess had no mind to go back with him as Princess of Amhor. From the moment that the vanguard of the Amhorian fleet was seen in the sky she had known, with the others of the city, the purpose for which they came and so she used her head to defeat that purpose. There was in her retinue a cosmetologist whose duty it was to preserve the lustrous beauty of the princess' hair and skin and prepare her for public audiences, for fetes and for the daily intercourse of the court. He was a master of his art; he could render the ugly pleasant to look upon, he could make the plain lovely, and he could make the lovely radiant. She called him quickly to her then and commanded him to make the radiant ugly and when he had done with her none might guess that she was the Princess of Duhor, so deftly had he wrought with his pigments and his tiny brushes.

"When Jal Had could not find the princess within the palace, and no amount of threat or torture could force a statement of her whereabouts from the loyal lips of her people, the Amhorian ordered that every woman within

the palace be seized and taken to Amhor, there to be held as hostage until the princess of Duhor should be delivered to him in marriage. We were therefore, all seized and placed upon an Amhorian war ship which was sent back to Amhor ahead of the balance of the fleet, which remained to complete the sacking of Duhor.

"When the ship, with its small convoy, had covered some four thousand of the five thousand haads that separate Duhor from Amhor

is was sighted by a fleet from Phundahl which immediately attacked. The convoying ships were destroyed or driven off and that which carried us was captured. We were taken to Phundahl where we were put upon the auction block and I fell to the bid of one of Ras Thavas' agents. The rest you know."

"Perhaps she died—her party was separated in Phundahl—but death could not more definitely prevent her return to Duhor. The Princess of Duhor will never again see her native country."

"But you may!" I cried, for I had suddenly hit upon a plan. "Where is Duhor?"

"You are going there?" she asked, laughingly.

"Yes!"

"YOU are mad, my friend. Duhor lies a full seven thousand eight hundred haads from Toonol, upon the opposite side of the snow clad Artolian Hills. You, a stranger and alone, could never reach it, for between lie the Toonolian Marshes, wild hordes, savage beasts and warlike cities. You would but die uselessly within the first dozen haads, even could you escape from the island upon



"That does not interest me. Quick! Reach a decision. In five tals I shall press this button. If you promise what I ask, you shall be restored with a new and beautiful body—if you refuse, you shall lie here in the semblance of death forever."

which stands the laboratory of Ras Thavas, and what motive is there to prompt you to such a useless sacrifice?"

I could not tell her. I could not look upon that withered figure and into that hideous and disfigured face and say: "It is because I love you, Valla Dia," but that, alas, was my only reason. Gradually, as I had come to know her through the slow revelation of the wondrous beauty of her mind and soul, there had crept into my heart a knowledge of my love, and yet, explain it I cannot, I could not speak the words to that frightful old hag. I had seen the gorgeous mundane tabernacle that had housed the equally gorgeous spirit of the real Valla Dia—that I could love; her heart and soul and mind I could love; but I could not love the body of Xaxa. I was torn, too, by other emotions, induced by a great doubt—could Valla Dia return my love? Habilitated in the corpse of Xaxa, with no other suitor, nay, with no other friend, about, she might, out of gratitude or through sheer loneliness, be attracted to me; but once again were she Valla Dia the beautiful and returned to the palace of her king, surrounded by the great nobles of Duhor would she have either eyes or heart for a lone and friendless exile from another world? I doubted it—and yet that doubt did not deter me from my determination to carry out, as far as Fate would permit, the mad scheme that was revolving in my brain.

"You have not answered my question, Vad Varo," she interrupted my surging thoughts. "Why would you do this thing?"

"To right the wrong that has been done you, Valla Dia," I said.

She sighed. "Do not attempt it, please," she begged; "you would but rob me of my one friend, whose association is the only source of happiness remaining to me. I appreciate your generosity and your loyalty, even though I may not understand them; your unselfish desire to serve me at such suicidal risk touches me more deeply than I can reveal, adding still further to the debt I owe you; but you must not attempt it—you must not."

"If it troubles you, Valla Dia," I replied, "we will not speak of it again, but know always that it is never from my thoughts. Some day I shall find a way, even though the plan I now have fails me."

The days moved on and on, the gorgeous Martian nights, filled with her hurtling moons, followed one upon another. Ras Thavas spent more and more time in directing my work of brain transference. I had long since become an adept and I realized that the time was rapidly approaching when Ras Thavas would feel that he could safely intrust to my hands and skill his life and future. He would be wholly within my power and he knew that I knew it. I could slay him; I could permit him to remain forever in the preserving grip of his own anesthetic; or I could play any trick upon him that I chose, even to giving him the body of a cat or a part of a brain of an ape; but he must take the chance and that I knew, for he was failing rapidly. Already almost stone blind, it was only the wonderful spectacles that he had himself invented that permitted him to see all; long deaf, he used artificial means for hearing, and now his heart was showing symptoms of fatigue that he could no longer ignore.

One morning I was summoned to his sleeping apartment by a slave. I found the old surgeon lying, a shrunken, pitiful heap of withered skin and bones.

"We must hasten, Vad Varo," he said in a weak whisper. "My heart was like to have stopped a few tals ago. It was then that I sent for you." He pointed to a door leading from his chamber. "There," he said, "you will find the body I have chosen. There, in the private laboratory I long ago built for this very purpose, you will per-

form the greatest surgical operation that the universe has ever known, transferring its most perfect brain to the most beautiful and perfect body that ever has passed beneath these ancient eyes. You will find the head already prepared to receive my brain; the brain of the subject having been removed and destroyed—totally destroyed by fire. I could not possibly chance the existence of a brain desiring and scheming to regain its wondrous body. No, I destroyed it. Call slaves and have them bear my body to the ersite slab."

"That will not be necessary," I told him, and lifting his shrunken form in my arms as if he were an earthly babe, I carried him into the adjoining room where I found a perfectly lighted and appointed laboratory containing two operating tables, one of which was occupied by the body of a red-man. Upon the surface of the other, which was vacant, I laid Ras Thavas, then I turned to look at the new envelope he had chosen. Never, I believe, had I beheld so perfect a form, so handsome a face—Ras Thavas had indeed chosen well for himself. Then I turned back to the old surgeon. Deftly, as he had taught me, I made the two incisions and attached the tubes. My finger rested upon the button that would start the motor pumping his blood from his vein and his marvellous preservative-anesthetic into them. Then I spoke.

"Ras Thavas," I said, "you have long been training me to this end; I have labored assiduously to prepare myself that there might be no slightest cause for apprehension as to the outcome. You have, coincidentally, taught me that one's every act should be prompted by self-interest only. You are satisfied, therefore, that I am not doing this for you because I love you, or because I feel any friendship for you; but you think that you have offered me enough in placing before me a similar opportunity for immortality.

"Regardless of your teaching I am afraid that I am still somewhat of a sentimentalist—I crave the redressing of wrongs—I have friendship and love. The price you offer is not enough. Are you willing to pay more that this operation may be successfully concluded?"

He looked at me steadily for a long minute. "What do you want?" he asked. I could see that he was trembling with anger, but he did not raise his voice.

"Do you recall 4296-E-2631-H?" I inquired.

"The subject with the body of Xaxa? yes, I recall the case. What of it?"

"I wish her body returned to her. That is the price you must pay for this operation."

He glared at me. "It is impossible. Xaxa has the body. Even if I eared to do so, I could never recover it. Proceed with the operation!"

"When you have promised me," I insisted.

"I cannot promise the impossible—I cannot obtain Xaxa. Ask me something else—I am not unwilling to grant any reasonable request."

"That is all I wish—just that; but I do not insist that you obtain the body. If I bring Xaxa here will you make the transfer?"

"It would mean war between Toonol and Phundahl," he fumed.

"That does not interest me," I said. "Quick! Reach a decision. In five tals I shall press this button. If you promise what I ask you shall be restored with a new and beautiful body—if you refuse you shall lie here in the semblance of death forever."

"I promise," he said slowly, "that when you bring the body of Xaxa to me I will transfer to that body any brain that you select from among my subjects."

"Good!" I exclaimed, and pressed the button.

CHAPTER V.

Danger

RAS Thavas awakened from the anesthetic a new and gorgeous creature—a youth of such wondrous beauty that he seemed of heavenly, rather than worldly origin; but in that beautiful head was the hard, cold thousand-year-old brain of the master surgeon. As he opened his eyes he looked upon me coldly.

"You have done well," he said.

"What I have done, I have done for friendship—perhaps for love," I said: "so you can thank the sentimentalism you decry for the success of the transfer."

He made no reply.

"And now," I continued, "I shall look to you for the fulfillment of the promise you have made me."

"When you bring Xaxa's body I shall transfer to it the brain of any of my subjects you may select," he said; "but were I you I would not risk my life in such an impossible venture—you cannot succeed. Select another body—there are many beautiful ones—and I will give it the brain of 4296-E-2631-H."

"None other than the body now owned by the Jeddara Xaxa will fulfill your promise to me," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders and there was a cold smile upon his handsome lips. "Very well," he said, "fetch Xaxa. When do you start?"

"I am not yet ready. I will let you know when I am."

"Good and now begone—but wait! First go to the office and see what cases await us and if there be any that do not require my personal attention, and they fall within your skill and knowledge, attend to them yourself."

As I left him I noticed a crafty smile of satisfaction upon his lips. What had aroused that? I did not like it and as I walked away I tried to conjure what could possibly have passed through that wondrous brain to call forth at that particular instant so unpleasant a smile. As I passed through the doorway and into the corridor beyond I heard him summon his personal slave and body servant, Yamdor, a huge fellow whose loyalty he kept through the bestowal of lavish gifts and countless favors. So great was the fellow's power that all feared him, as a word to the master from the lips of Yamdor might easily send any of the numerous slaves or attendants to an ersite slab for eternity. It was rumored that he was the result of an unnatural experiment which had combined the brain of a woman with the body of a man, and there was much in his actions and mannerisms to justify this general belief. His touch, when he worked about his master, was soft and light, his movements graceful, his ways gentle, but his mind was jealous, vindictive and unforgiving.

I believe that he did not like me, through jealousy of the authority I had attained in the establishment of Ras Thavas, for there was no questioning the fact that I was a lieutenant, while he was but a slave; yet he always accorded me the utmost respect. He was, however, merely a minor cog in the machinery of the great institution presided over by the sovereign mind of Ras Thavas, and as such I have given him little consideration, nor did I now, as I bent my steps toward the office.

I had gone but a short distance when I recalled a matter of importance upon which it was necessary for me to obtain instructions from Ras Thavas immediately, and so I wheeled about and retraced my way toward his apartments, through the open doorway of which, as I approached, I heard the new voice of the master surgeon. Ras Thavas had always spoken in rather loud tones; whether as a vocal reflection of his naturally domineering and authoritative character, or because of his deafness, I do not know, and now, with the fresh young vocal chords of his new

body, his words rang out clearly and distinctly in the corridor leading to his room.

"You will therefore, Yamdor," he was saying, "go at once and, selecting two slaves in whose silence and discretion you may trust, take the subject from the apartments of Vad Varo and destroy it—let no vestige of body or brain remain. Immediately after you will bring the two slaves to the laboratory F-30-L, permitting them to speak to no one, and I will consign them to silence and forgetfulness for eternity."

"Vad Varo will discover the absence of the subject and report the matter to me. During my investigation you will confess that you aided 4296-E-2631-H to escape, but that you have no idea where it intended going. I will sentence you to death as punishment, but at last, explaining how urgently I need your services and upon your solemn promise never to transgress again, I will defer punishment for the term of your continued good behavior. Do you thoroughly understand the entire plan?"

"Yes, master," replied Yamdor.

"Then depart at once and select the slaves who are to assist you."

Quickly and silently I sped along the corridor until the first intersection permitted me to place myself out of sight of anyone coming from Ras Thavas' apartment, then I went directly to the chamber occupied by Valla Dia. Unlocking the door I threw it open and beckoned her to come out. "Quick! Valla Dia!" I cried. "No time is to be lost. In attempting to save you I have but brought destruction upon you. First we must find a hiding place for you, and that at once—afterward we can plan for the future."

The place that first occurred to me as affording adequate concealment was the half forgotten vaults in the pits beneath the laboratories and toward these I hastened Valla Dia. As we proceeded, I narrated all that had transpired, nor did she once reproach me; but, instead, expressed naught but gratitude for what she was pleased to designate as my unselfish friendship. That it had miscarried, she assured me, was no reflection upon me and she insisted that she would rather die in the knowledge that she possessed one such friend than to live on indefinitely, friendless.

We came at last to the chamber I sought—vault L-42-X, in building 4-J-21, where reposed the bodies of the ape and the man, each of which possessed half the brain of the other. Here I was forced to leave Valla Dia for the time that I might hasten to the office and perform the duties imposed upon me by Ras Thavas, lest his suspicions be aroused when Yamdor reported that he had found her apartment vacant.

I REACHED the office without being discovered by anyone who might report the fact to Ras Thavas that I had been a long time coming from his apartment, and there, to my relief, I found there were no cases waiting. Without appearing in any undue haste I nevertheless soon found an excuse to depart and at once made my way toward my own quarters, moving in a leisurely and unconcerned manner and humming, as was my wont (a habit which greatly irritated Ras Thavas), snatches from some song that had been popular at the time that I quit Earth. In this instance it was Oh, Frenchy!

I was thus engaged when I met Yamdor moving hurriedly along the corridor leading from my apartment in company with two male slaves. I greeted him pleasantly, as was my custom, and he returned my greeting, but there was an expression of fear and suspicion in his eyes. I went at once to my quarters, opened the door leading to the chamber formerly occupied by Valla Dia and then hastened immediately to the apartment of Ras Thavas, where I found him conversing with Yamdor. I rushed in apparently breathless and simulating great excitement.

"Ras Thavas," I demanded, "what have you done with 4296-E-2631-H? She has disappeared—her apartment is empty and as I was approaching it I met Yamdor and two other slaves coming from that direction." I turned then upon Yamdor and pointed an accusing finger at him. "Yamdor!" I cried. "What have you done with this woman?"

Both Ras Thavas and Yamdor seemed genuinely puzzled and I congratulated myself that I had thus readily thrown them off the track. The master surgeon declared that he would make an immediate investigation and he at once ordered a thorough search of the grounds and of the island outside the enclosure. Yamdor denied any knowledge of the woman and I, at least, was aware of the sincerity of his protestations, but not so Ras Thavas and I could see a hint of suspicion in his eyes as he questioned his body servant; but evidently he could conjure no motive for any such treasonable action on the part of Yamdor as would have been represented by the abduction of the woman and the consequent gross disobedience of orders.

Ras Thavas' investigation revealed nothing and I think that as it progressed he became gradually more and more imbued with a growing suspicion that I might know more about the disappearance of Valla Dia than my attitude indicated, for I presently became aware of a delicately concealed espionage. Up to this time I had been able to smuggle food to Valla Dia every night, after Ras Thavas had retired to his quarters; but then, on one occasion, I suddenly became subconsciously aware that I was being followed and instead of going to the vaults I went to the office, where I added some observations to my report upon a case I had handled that day. Returning to my room I hummed a few bars from "Over There" that the suggestion of my unconscious might be accentuated. From the moment that I quit my quarters until I returned to them I was sure that eyes had been watching my every move. What was I to do? Valla Dia must have food—without it she would die and were I to be followed to her hiding place while taking it to her she would die; Ras Thavas would see to that. Half the night I lay awake, racking my brains for some solution to the problem. There seemed only one way—to elude the spies. If I could do this but one single time I could carry out the balance of a plan that had occurred to me and which I thought the only one feasible that might eventually lead to the resurrection of Valla Dia in her own body. The way was long, the risks great; but I was young, in love and utterly reckless of consequences in-so-far as they concerned me—it was Valla Dia's happiness alone that I could not risk too greatly, except under dire stress. Well, the dire stress existed and I must risk the chance, even as I risked my life.

My plan was formulated and I lay awake upon my sleeping silks and furs in the darkness of my room awaiting the time when I might put it into execution. My window, which was upon the third floor, overlooked the walled enclosure upon the scarlet sward of which I had made my first bow to Barsoom. Across the open casement I had watched Cluros, the farther moon, take his slow deliberate way. He had already set. Behind him, Thuria, his elusive mistress, fled through the heavens; in five xats (about 15 minutes) she would set, and then, for about three and three-quarter Earth hours the heavens would be dark, except for the stars—dark enough at least for the thing I had in mind.

In the corridor, perhaps, lurked those watchful eyes—I prayed God that they might not be elsewhere as Thuria sank at last beneath the horizon and I swung to my window ledge, in my hand a long rope fabricated from braided strips torn from my sleeping silks while I had awaited the setting of the moons. One end I had fastened to a heavy sorapus bench which I had drawn close to the

window. I dropped the free end of the rope and started my descent. My Earthly muscles, untried in such endeavors, I had not trusted to the task of carrying me to my window ledge in a single leap when I was ready to return. I felt that they would, but I did not know and too much depended upon the success of my venture to risk any unnecessary chance of failure. And so I had prepared the rope.

Whether I was being observed I did not know. I must go on as though none was spying upon me. In less than four hours Thuria would return (just before the sudden Barsoomian dawn) and in the interval I must reach Valla Dia, persuade her of the necessity of my plan and carry out its details, returning to my chamber before Thuria could disclose me to any accidental observer. I carried my weapons with me and in my heart was unbending determination to slay whomever might cross my path and recognize me during the course of my errand, however innocent of evil intent against me they might be.

The night was quiet except for the usual distant sounds that I had heard at night ever since I had been there—sounds that I had interpreted as the cries of savage beasts. Once I had asked Ras Thavas about them, but he had been in ill humor and had ignored my question. I reached the ground quickly and without hesitation moved directly to the nearest entrance to the building, having previously searched out and determined upon the route I would follow to the vault. No one was visible and I was confident when at last I reached the doorway that I had come through undetected. Valla Dia was so happy to see me again that it almost brought the tears to my eyes.

"I thought that something had happened to you," she cried, "for I knew that you would not remain away so long of your own volition."

I told her of my conviction that I was being watched and that it would not be possible for me to longer bring food to her without incurring almost certain detection, which would spell immediate death for her.

"There is a single alternative," I said, "and that I dread even to suggest and would not were there any other way. You must be securely hidden for a long time until Ras Thavas' suspicions have been allayed, for so long as he has me watched I cannot possibly carry out the plans I have formulated for your eventual release, the restoration of your own body and your return to Duhor."

"Your will shall be my law, Vad Varo," she said.

I shook my head. "It will be harder for you than you imagine."

"What is the way?" she asked.

I pointed to the ersite topped table. "You must pass again through that ordeal that I may hide you away in this vault until the time is ripe for the carrying out of my plans. Can you endure it?"

She smiled. "Why not?" she asked. "It is only sleep—if it lasts forever I shall be no wiser."

I WAS surprised that she did not shrink from the idea, but I was also gratified since I knew that it was the only chance we had for success. Without my help, she disposed herself upon the ersite slab.

"I am ready, Vad Varo," she said, bravely; "hut first promise me that you will take no risks in this mad venture. You cannot succeed. When I close my eyes I know that it will be for the last time if my resurrection depends upon the successful outcome of the maddest venture that ever man conceived, yet I am happy, because I know that it is inspired by the greatest friendship with which any mortal woman has ever been blessed."

As she talked I had been adjusting the tubes and now I stood beside her with my finger upon the starting button of the motor.

"Good-bye, Vad Varo," she whispered.

"Not good-bye, Valla Dia," but only a sweet sleep for what to you will be the briefest instant. You will seem to but close your eyes and open them again. As you see me now I shall be standing here beside you as though I never had departed from you. As I am the last that you look upon tonight before you close your eyes, so shall I be the first that you shall look upon as you open them on that new and beautiful morning; but you shall not again look forth through the eyes of Xaxa, but from the limpid depths of your own beautiful orbs."

She smiled and shook her head. Two tears formed beneath her lids. I pressed her hand in mine and touched the button.

CHAPTER VI.

Suspicious

IN-SO-FAR as I could know I reached my apartment without detection and, hiding my rope where I was sure it would not be discovered, I sought my sleeping silks and furs and was soon asleep.

The following morning as I emerged from my quarters I caught a fleeting glimpse of a figure in a nearby corridor and from then on for a long time I had further evidence that Ras Thavas suspected me. I went at once to his quarters, as had been my habit. He seemed restless, but he gave me no hint that he held any assurance that I had been responsible for the disappearance of Valla Dia and I think that he was far from positive of it—it was simply that his judgment pointed to the fact that I was the only person who might have any reason for interfering in any way with this particular subject and he was having me watched to either prove or disprove the truth of his reasonable suspicion. His restlessness he explained to me himself.

"I have often studied the reactions of others who have undergone brain transference," he said, "and so I am not wholly surprised at my own. Not only has my brain energy been stimulated, resulting in an increased production of nervous energy, but I also feel the effects of the young tissue and youthful blood of my new body and they are affecting my consciousness in a way that my experiments had vaguely indicated but which I now see must be actually experienced to be fully understood. My thoughts, my inclinations, even my ambitions have been changed, or at least colored, by the transfer. It will take some time for me to find myself."

Though uninterested, I listened politely until he was through and then I changed the subject. "Have you located the missing woman?" I asked.

He shook his head, negatively.

"You must appreciate, Ras Thavas," I said, "that I fully realize that you must have known that the removal or destruction of that woman would entirely frustrate my entire plan. You are master here. Nothing that passes is without your knowledge."

"You mean that I am responsible for the disappearance of the woman?" he demanded.

"Certainly. It is obvious. I demand that she be restored."

He lost his temper. "Who are you to demand?" he shouted. "You are naught but a slave. Cease your impudence or I shall erase you—erase you. It will be as though you never had existed."

I laughed in his face. "Anger is the most futile attribute of the sentimentalist," I reminded him. "You will not erase me, for I alone stand between you and mortality."

"I can train another," he parried.

"But you could not trust him after you had trained him," I pointed out.

"But you bargained with me for my life when you had me in your power," he cried.

"For nothing that it would have harmed you to have granted willingly. I did not ask anything for myself. Be that as it may you will trust me again—you will trust, if for no other reason than that you will be forced to trust me and so why not win my gratitude and my loyalty by returning the woman to me and carrying out in spirit as well as in fact the terms of our agreement?"

He turned and looked steadily at me. "Vad Varo," he said, "I give you the word of honor of a Barsoomian noble that I know absolutely nothing concerning the whereabouts of 4296-E-2631-H."

"Perhaps Yamdor does," I persisted.

"Nor Yamdor. Of my knowledge no person in any way connected with me knows what became of it. I have spoken the truth."

Well, the conversation was not so profitless as it might appear for I was sure that it had almost convinced Ras Thavas that I was equally as ignorant of the fate of Valla Dia as was he. That it had not wholly convinced him was evidenced by the fact that the espionage continued for a long time, a fact which determined me to use Ras Thavas' own methods in my own defence. I had had allotted to me a number of slaves and these I had won over by kindness and understanding until I knew that I had the full measure of their loyalty. They had no reason to love Ras Thavas and every reason to hate him, and on the other hand they had no reason to hate me and I saw to it that they had every reason to love me. The result was that I had no difficulty in enlisting the services of a couple of them to spy upon Ras Thavas' spies, with the result that I was soon apprised that my suspicions were well founded—I was being constantly watched every minute that I was out of my apartment, but the spying did not come beyond my outer chamber walls. That was why I had been successful in reaching the vault in the manner that I had; the spies having assumed that I would leave my chamber only by its natural exit had been content to watch only that.

IT was in about two of our months that the spying ceased entirely. All that time I was fretting at the delay, for I wanted to be about my plans which it would have been absolutely impossible for me to carry out if I were being watched. I had spent the interval in studying the geography of the north eastern Barsoomian hemisphere where my activities were to be carried on and also in scanning a great number of case histories and inspecting the subjects to which they referred; but at least, with the removal of the spies, it began to look as though I might soon commence to put my plans in active operation.

Ras Thavas had for some time permitted me considerable freedom in independent investigation and experiment and this I determined to take advantage of in every possible way that might forward my plans for the resurrection of Valla Dia. My study of the histories of many of the cases had been with the possibility in mind of discovering subjects that might be of assistance to me in my venture. Among those that had occupied my careful attention there were, quite naturally, the cases with which I had been most familiar, namely; 378-J-493811-P, the red-man from whose vicious attack I had saved Ras Thavas upon the day of my advent upon Mars, and he whose brain had been divided with an ape. The former, 378-J-493811-P, had been a native of Phundahl—a young warrior attached to the court of Xaxa, Jeddara of Phundahl—and a victim of assassination. His body had been purchased by a Phundahlian noble for the purpose, as Ras Thavas had narrated, of winning the favor of a young beauty. I felt that I might possibly enlist his services, but that would depend upon the extent of his loyalty to-

ward Xaxa which I could only determine by reviving and questioning him.

He whose brain had been divided with an ape had originated in Ptarth, which lay at a considerable distance to the west of Phundahl and a little south and about an equal distance from Duhor, which lay north and a little west of it. An inhabitant of Ptarth, I reasoned, would know much of the entire country included in the triangle formed by Phundahl, Ptarth and Duhor; the strength and ferocity of the great ape would prove of value in crossing beast infested wastes and I felt that I could hold forth sufficient promise to the human half of the great beast's brain, which really now dominated the creature, to win its support and loyalty. The third subject that I had tentatively selected had been a notorious Toonolian assassin, whose audacity, fearlessness and swordsmanship had won for him a reputation that had spread far beyond the boundaries of his country. Ras Thavas, himself a Toonolian, had given me something of the history of this man whose grim calling is not without honor upon Barsoom and which Gor Hajus had raised still higher in the esteem of his countrymen through the fact that he never struck down a woman or a good man and that he never struck from behind. His killings were always the results of fair fights in which the victim had every opportunity to defend himself and slay his attacker, and he was famous for his loyalty to his friends. In fact this very loyalty had been a contributing factor in his downfall which had brought him to one of Ras Thavas' ersite slabs some years since, for he had earned the enmity of Vobis Kan, Jeddak of Toonol, through his refusal to assassinate a man who once had befriended Gor Hajus in some slight degree; following which Vobis Kan conceived the suspicion that Gor Hajus had him marked for slaying. The result was inevitable: Gor Hajus was arrested and condemned to death and immediately following the execution of the sentence an agent of Ras Thavas had purchased the body.

These three, then, I had chosen to be my partners in my great adventure. It is true that I had not discussed the matter with any one of them, but my judgment assured me that I would have no difficulty in enlisting their services and loyalty in return for their total resurrection.

My first task lay in renewing the organs of 378-J-493811-P and of Gor Hajus which had been injured by the wounds that had layed them low, the former requiring a new lung and the latter a new heart, his executioner having run him through with a short-sword. I hesitated to ask Ras Thavas' permission to experiment on these subjects for fear of the possibility of arousing his suspicions, in which event he would probably have them destroyed, and so I was forced to accomplish my designs by subterfuge and stealth. To this end I made it a practice for weeks to carry my regular laboratory work far into the night, often requiring the services of various assistants that all might become accustomed to the sight of me at work at unusual hours and in my selection of these assistants I made it a point to choose two of the very spies that Ras Thavas had set to watching me. While it was true that they were no longer employed in this particular service I had hopes that they would carry word of my activities to their master and I was careful to see that they received from me the proper suggestions that would mold their report in language far from harmful to me. By the merest suggestion I carried to them the idea that I worked thus late purely for the love of the work itself and the tremendous interest in it that Ras Thavas had awakened within my mind. Some nights I worked with assistants and as often I did not, but always I was careful to assure myself that the following morning those in the office were made aware that I had labored far into the preceding night.

This groundwork carefully prepared I had comparatively little fear of the results of actual discovery when I set to work upon the warrior of Phundahl and the assassin of Toonol. I chose the former first. His lung was badly injured where my blade had passed through it, but from the laboratory where were kept fractional bodies I brought a perfect lung with which I replaced the one that I had ruined. The work occupied but half the night and so anxious was I to complete my task that I immediately opened up the breast of Gor Hajus for whom I had selected an unusually strong and powerful heart and by working rapidly I succeeded in completing the transference before dawn. Having known the nature of the wounds that had dispatched these two men I had spent weeks in performing similar operations that I might perfect myself especially in this work and having encountered no unusual pathological conditions in either subject the work had progressed smoothly and with great rapidity. I had completed what I had feared would be the most difficult part of my task and now, having removed, as far as possible, all signs of the operations, except the therapeutic tape which closed the incisions, I returned to my quarters for a few minutes' much needed rest, praying that Ras Thavas would not by any chance examine either of the subjects upon which I had been working, although I had fortified myself against such a contingency by entering full details of the operations upon the history card of each subject that, in the event of discovery, any suspicion of ulterior motives upon my part might be allayed by my apparent open frankness.

I AROSE at the usual time and went at once to Ras Thavas' apartment where I was met with a bombshell that nearly wrecked my composure. He eyed me closely for a long minute before he spoke.

"You worked late last night, Vad Varo," he said.

"I often do," I replied; but my heart was heavy as a stone.

"And what might it have been that so occupied your interest?" he inquired.

I felt as the mouse must with which the cat is playing. "I have been doing quite a little lung and heart transference of late," I replied, "and I became so engrossed with my work that I did not note the passage of time."

"I have known that you worked late at night. Do you think it wise?"

At that moment I felt that it had been very unwise, yet I answered him to the contrary.

"I was restless," he said; "I could not sleep and so I went to your quarters after midnight, but you were not there. I wanted someone with whom to talk, but your slaves knew only that you were not there—where you were they did not know—so I set out to search for you." My heart went into my sandals. "I guessed that you were in one of the laboratories, but though I visited several I did not find you." My heart arose with the lightness of a feather. "Since my own transference I have been cursed with restlessness and sleeplessness so that I could almost wish for the return of my old corpse—the youth of my body harmonizes not with the antiquity of my brain. It is filled with latent urges and desires that comport illy with the serious subject matter of my mind."

"What your body needs," I said, "is exercise. It is young, strong, virile—work it hard and it will let your brain rest at night."

"I know that you are right," he replied. "I have reached that same conclusion myself. In fact, not finding you, I walked in the gardens for an hour or more before returning to my quarters and then I slept soundly. I shall walk every night when I cannot sleep, or I shall go into the laboratories and work as you do."

This news was most disquieting. Now I could never be sure but that Ras Thavas was wandering about at night and I had one more night's very important work to do; perhaps two. The only way that I could be sure of him was to be with him.

"Send for me when you are restless," I said, "and I will walk and work with you. You should not go about thus at night alone."

"Very well," he said, "I may do that occasionally."

I hoped that he would do it always, for then I would know that when he failed to send for me he was safe in his quarters, yet I saw that I must henceforth face the menace of detection and knowing this I determined to hasten the completion of my plans and to risk everything on a single bold stroke.

That night I had no opportunity to put it into action as Ras Thavas sent for me early and informed me that we would walk in the gardens until he was tired. Now, as I needed a full night for what I had in mind and as Ras Thavas walked until mid-night I was compelled to forego everything for that night; but the following afternoon I persuaded him to walk early on the pretext that I should like to go beyond the enclosure and see something of Barsoom besides the inside of his laboratories and his gardens. I had little confidence that he would grant my request, yet he did so. I am sure he never would have done it had he possessed his old body; but thus greatly had young blood changed Ras Thavas.

I had never been beyond the buildings nor had I seen beyond, since there were no windows in the outside walls of any of the structures and upon the garden side the trees had grown to such a height that they obstructed all view beyond them. For a time we walked in another garden just inside the outer wall and then I asked Ras Thavas if I might go even beyond this.

"No," he said. "It would not be safe."

"And why not?" I asked.

"I will show you and at the same time give you a much broader view of the outside world than you could obtain by merely passing through the gate. Come, follow me!"

He led me immediately to a lofty tower that rose at the corner of the largest building of the group that comprised his vast establishment. Within was a circular runway which led not only upward, but down as well. This we ascended, passing openings at each floor, until we came at last out upon its lofty summit. About me spread the first Barsoomian landscape of any extent upon which my eyes had yet rested during the long months that I had spent upon the Red Planet—for almost an Earthly year I had been immured within the rim walls of Ras Thavas' bloody laboratory until, such creatures of habit are we, the weird life there had come to seem quite natural and ordinary; but with this first glimpse of open country there surged up within me an urge for freedom, for space, for room to move about such as I knew would not be long denied.

Directly beneath lay an irregular patch of rocky land elevated perhaps a dozen feet or more above the general level of the immediately surrounding country. Its extent was, at a rough guess, a hundred acres. Upon this stood the buildings and grounds, which were inclosed by a high wall. The tower upon which we stood was situated at about the center of the total area enclosed. Beyond the outer wall was a strip of rocky ground on which grew a sparse forest of fair sized trees interspersed with patches of a jungly growth and beyond all what appeared to be an oozy marsh through which were narrow water courses connecting occasional open water—little lakes, the largest of which could have comprised scarce two acres. This land-

scape extended as far as the eye could reach, broken by occasional islands similar to that upon which we were and at a short distance by the skyline of a large city, whose towers and domes and minarets glistened and sparkled in the sun as though plated with shining metals and picked out with precious gems.

This, I knew, must be Toonol and all about us The Great Toonolian Marshes which extend nearly eighteen hundred earth miles east and west and in some places have a width of three hundred miles. Little is known about them in other portions of Barsoom as they are frequented by fierce beasts, afford no landing places for fliers and are commanded by Phundahl at their western end and Toonol at the east, inhospitable kingdoms that invite no intercourse with the outside world and maintain their independence by their inaccessibility and savage aloofness.

As my eyes returned to the island at our feet I saw a huge form emerge from one of the nearby patches of jungle a short distance beyond the outer wall. It was followed by a second and a third. Ras Thavas saw that the creatures had attracted my notice.

"There," he said, pointing to them, "are three of a number of similar reasons why it would not have been safe for us to venture outside the enclosure."

They were great white apes of Barsoom, creatures so savage that even that fierce Barsoomian lion, the banth, hesitates to cross their path.

"They serve two purposes," explained Ras Thavas; "they discourage those who might otherwise creep upon me by night from the city of Toonol, where I am not without many good enemies, and they prevent desertion upon the part of my slaves and assistants."

"But how do your clients reach you?" I asked. "How are your supplies brought in?"

He turned and pointed down toward the highest portion of the irregular roof of the building clustered below us. Built upon it was a large, shed-like structure. "There," he said, "I keep three small ships.. One of them goes every day to Toonol."

I was overcome with eagerness to know more about these ships, in which I thought I saw a much needed means of escape from the island; but I dared not question him for fear of arousing his suspicions.

As we turned to descend the tower runway I expressed interest in the structure, which gave evidence of being far older than any of the surrounding buildings.

"This tower," said Ras Thavas, "was built some twenty three thousand years ago by an ancestor of mine who was driven from Toonol by the reigning jeddak of the time. Here, and upon other islands, he gathered a considerable following, dominated the surrounding marshes and defended himself successfully for hundreds of years. While my family has been permitted to return to Toonol since, this has been their home, to which, one by one, have been added the various buildings which you see about the tower, each floor of which connects with the adjacent building from the roof to the lowest pits beneath the ground."

This information also interested me greatly since I thought that I saw where it too might have considerable bearing upon my plan of escape and so, as we descended the runway, I encouraged Ras Thavas to discourse upon the construction of the tower, its relation to the other buildings and especially its accessibility from the pits. We walked again in the outer garden and by the time we returned to Ras Thavas' quarters it was almost dark and the master surgeon was considerably fatigued.

"I feel that I shall sleep well to-night," he said, as I left him.

"I hope so, Ras Thavas," I replied.

CHAPTER VII.

Escape

IT was usually about three hours after the evening meal, which was served immediately after dark, that the establishment quieted down for the night and while I should have preferred waiting longer than that before undertaking that which I had in mind I could not safely do so, since there was much to be accomplished before dawn, and so it was that with the first indications that the occupants of the building in which my work was to be performed had retired for the night I left my quarters and went directly to the laboratory where, fortunately for my plans, the bodies of Gor Hajus, the assassin of Toonol, and 378-J-493811-P both reposed. It was the work of but a few minutes to carry them to adjoining tables where I quickly strapped them securely against the possibility that one or both of them might not be willing to agree to the proposition I was about to make them and thus force me to anesthetize them again. At last the incisions were made, the tubes attached and the motors started. 378-J-493811-P, whom I shall hereafter call by his own name, Dar Tarus, was the first to open his eyes, but he had not regained full consciousness when Gor Hajus showed signs of life.

I waited until both appeared quite restored. Dar Tarus was eyeing me with growing recognition that brought a most venomous expression of hatred to his countenance. Gor Hajus was frankly puzzled. The last he remembered was the scene in the death chamber at the instant that his executioner had run a sword through his heart. It was I who broke the silence.

"In the first place," I said, "let me tell you where you are, if you do not already know."

"I know well enough where I am," growled Dar Tarus.

"Ah!" explained Gor Hajus, whose eyes had been roaming about the chamber; "I can guess where I am. What Toonolian has not heard of Ras Thavas? So they sold my corpse to the old butcher, did they? And what now? Did I just arrive?"

"You have been here six years," I told him, "and you may stay here forever unless we three can reach an agreement within the next few minutes, and that goes for you too, Dar Tarus."

"Six years!" mused Gor Hajus. "Well, out with it, man—what do you want? If it is to slay Ras Thavas, no! He has saved me from utter destruction; but name me some other, preferably Vobis Kahn, Jeddak of Toonol, find me a blade and I will slay a hundred to regain life."

"I seek the life of none unless he stands in the way of the fulfillment of my desire in this matter that I have in hand. Listen! Ras Thavas had here a beautiful Duhorian girl. He sold her body to Xaxa, Jeddara of Phundahl transplanting the girl's brain to the wrinkled and hideous body of the Jeddara. It is my intention to regain the body, restore it to its own brain and return the girl to Duhor."

Gor Hajus grinned. "You have a large contract on your hands," he said; "but I can see that you are a man after my own heart and I am with you. It will give me free-



"And you?" I asked, turning to Dar Tarus as I released the bonds that held Gor Hajus. For the first time I now noticed that the ugly expression that I had first noted upon the face of Dar Tarus had given place to one of eagerness. "Strike off my bonds," he said, "and I will follow you to the ends of Barsoom!"

dom and fighting, and all that I ask is a chance for one thrust at Vobis Kan."

"I promise you life," I replied; "but with the understanding that you serve me faithfully and none other, undertaking no business of your own, until mine has been earned to a successful conclusion."

"That means that I shall have to serve you for life," he replied, "for the thing you have undertaken you can never accomplish; but that is better than lying here on a cold ersite slab waiting for old Ras Thavas to come along and carve out my gizzard. I am yours! Let me up, that I may feel a good pair of legs under me again."

"And you?" I asked, turning to Dar Tarus as I released the bonds that held Gor Hajus. For the first time I now noticed that the ugly expression that I had first noted upon the face of Dar Tarus had given place to one of eagerness.

"Strike off my bonds!" he cried; "and I will follow you to the ends of Barsoom and the way leads thus far to the fulfillment of your designs; but it will not. It will lead to Phundahl and to the chamber of the wicked Xaxa, where, by the generosity of my ancestors, I may be given the opportunity to avenge the hideous wrong the creature did me. You could not have chosen one better fitted for your mission than Dar Tarus, one time soldier of the Jeddara's Guard, whom she had slain that in my former body one of her rotten nobles might woo the girl I loved."

A moment later the two men stood at my side and without more delay I led them toward the runway that descended to the pits beneath the buildings and as we went I described to them the creature I had chosen to be the fourth member of our strange party. Gor Hajus questioned the wisdom of my choice, saying that the ape would attract too much attention to us; but Dar Tarus believed that it might be helpful in many respects, since it was

possible that we might be compelled to spend some time among the islands of the marshes which were often infested with these creatures, while, once in Phundahl, the ape might readily be used in the furtherance of our plans and would cause no considerable comment in a city where many of these beasts are held in captivity and often are seen performing for the edification of street crowds.

We went at once to the vault where the ape lay and where I had concealed the anesthetized body of Valla Dia and here I revived the great anthropoid and to my great relief found that the human half of its brain still was dominant. Briefly I explained my plan as I had to the other two and won the hearty promise of his support upon my engaging to restore his brain to its rightful place upon the completion of our venture.

First we must get off the island and I outlined the two plans I had in mind. One was to steal one of Ras Thavas' three fliers and set out directly for Phundahl and the other, in the event that the first did not seem feasible, was to secrete ourselves aboard one of them on the chance that we might either overpower the crew and take over the ship after we had left the island, or escape undetected upon its arrival in Toonol. Dar Tarus liked the first plan, the ape, whom we now called by the name belonging to the human half of his brain, Hovan Du, preferred the first alternative of the second plan and Gor Hajus the second alternative.

DAR Tarus explained that as our principal objective was Phundahl, the quicker we got there the better; Hovan Du said that by seizing the ship after it had left the island we would have longer time in which to make our escape before the ship was missed and pursuit instituted than by seizing it now in the full knowledge that its absence would be discovered within a few hours. Gor Hajus thought that it would be better if we could come into Toonol secretly and there, through one of his friends, secure arms and a flier of our own. It would never do, he insisted, to attempt to go far without arms for himself and Dar Tarus, nor could we hope to reach Phundahl without being overhauled by pursuers, for we must plan on the hypothesis that Ras Thavas would immediately discover my absence, that he would at once investigate, that he would find Dar Tarus and Gor Hajus missing and thereupon lose no time in advising Vobis Kan, Jeddak of Toonol, that Gor Hajus the assassin was at large, whereupon the jeddak's best ships would be sent in pursuit.

Gor Hajus' reasoning was sound and coupled with my recollection that Ras Thavas had told me that his three ships were slow I could readily foresee that our liberty would be of short duration were we to steal one of the old surgeon's fliers.

As we discussed the matter, we had made our way through the pits and I had found the exit to the tower. Silently we passed upward along the runway and out upon the roof. Both moons were waning low through the heavens and the scene was almost as light as day. If anyone was about, discovery was certain. We hastened toward the hangar and were soon within it, where, for a moment at least, I breathed far more easily than I had beneath those two brilliant moons upon the exposed roof.

The fliers were peculiar looking contrivances, low, sonar, with rounded bows and sterns and covered decks, their every line proclaiming them as cargo carriers built for anything but speed. One was much smaller than the other two and a second was quite evidently undergoing repairs. The third I entered and examined carefully. Gor Hajus was with me and pointed out several places where we might hide with little likelihood of discovery unless it were suspected that we might be aboard and that of course

constituted a very real danger; so much so that I had about decided to risk all aboard the small flier, which Gor Hajus assured me would be the fastest of the three, when Dar Tarus stuck his head into the ship and motioned me to come quickly.

"There was someone about," he said, "when I reached this side."

"Where?" I demanded.

"Come," he said and led me to the rear of the hangar which was flush with the wall of the building upon which it stood and pointed through one of the windows there down into the inner garden where, to my consternation, I saw Ras Thavas walking slowly to and fro. For an instant I was sick with despair, for I knew that no ship could leave that roof unseen while anyone was abroad in the garden beneath and Ras Thavas least of all people in the world; but suddenly a great light dawned upon me. I called the three close to me and explained my plan. Instantly they grasped the possibilities in it and a moment later we had run the small flier out upon the roof and turned her nose toward the east, away from Toonol. Then Gor Hajus entered her, set the various controls as we had decided, opened the throttle, slipped back to the roof and the four of us hastened into the hangar and ran to the rear window where we saw the ship moving slowly and gracefully out over the garden. Ras Thavas' ears must instantly have caught the faint purring of the motor for he was looking up by the time we reached the windows.

Instantly he hailed the ship and stepping back from the window that he might not see me, I answered.

"Good-bye, Ras Thavas," I cried. "It is I, Vad Varo, going out into a strange world to see what it is like. I will return. The spirits of your ancestors be with you until then." That was a phrase I had picked up from reading in Ras Thavas' library and I was quite proud of it.

"Come back at once," he shouted up in reply, "or you will be with the spirits of your own ancestors before another day is done."

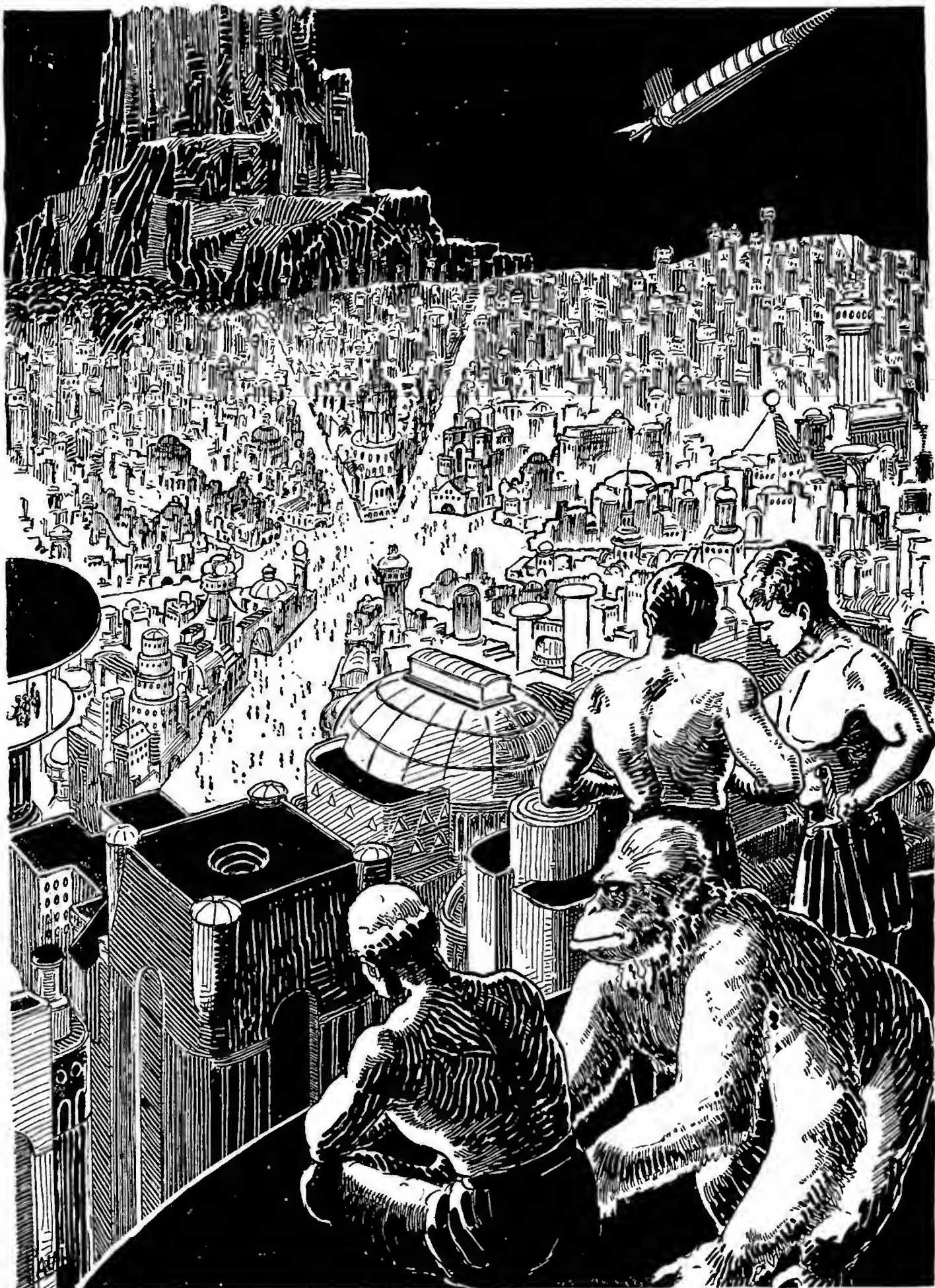
I made no reply. The ship was now at such a distance that I feared my voice might no longer seem to come from it and that we should be discovered. Without more delay we at once concealed ourselves aboard one of the remaining fliers, that upon which no work was being done, and there commenced as long and tiresome a period of waiting as I can recall ever having passed through.

I had at last given up any hope of the ship's being flown that day when I heard voices in the hangar and presently the sound of footsteps aboard the flier. A moment later a few commands were given and almost immediately the ship moved slowly out into the open.

The four of us were crowded into a small compartment built into a tiny space between the forward and aft starboard buoyancy tanks. It was very dark and poorly ventilated, having evidently been designed as a storage closet to utilize otherwise waste space. We dared not converse for fear of attracting attention to our presence and for the same reason we moved about as little as possible, since we had no means of knowing but that some member of the crew might be just beyond the thin door that separated us from the main cabin of the ship. Altogether we were most uncomfortable, but the distance to Toonol is not so great that we might not hope that our situation would soon be changed—at least if Toonol was to be the destination of the ship; and of this we soon had cheering hope, for we had been out but a short time when, faintly, we heard a hail and then the motors were shut down and the ship stopped.

"What ship?" we heard a voice demand, and from aboard our own came the reply:

"The Vosar, Tower of Thavas for Toonol." We heard a scraping as the other ship touched ours.



Several hundred feet below us lay spread the broad, well lighted avenues of
cylindrical metal shaft. Where the residences predominated, the

Toonol.... Here and there a building was raised high upon its supporting,
city took on the appearance of a colossal and grotesque forest.

"We are coming aboard to search you in the name of Vobis Kan, Jeddak of Toonol. Make way!" shouted one from the other ship. Our cheer had been of short duration. We heard the shuffling of many feet and Gor Hajus whispered in my ear.

"What shall we do?" he asked.

I slipped my short sword into his hand. "Fight!" I replied.

"Good, Vad Varo," he replied and then I handed him my pistol and told him to pass it on to Dar Tarus. We heard the voices again, but nearer now.

"What ho!" cried one. "It is Bal Zak himself, my old friend Bal Zak!"

"None other," replied a deep voice; "and whom did you expect to find in command of The Vosar other than Bal Zak?"

"Who could know but that it might have been this Vad Varo himself, or even Gor Hajus," said the other, "and our orders are to search all ships."

"I would that they were here," replied Bal Zak, "for the reward is high, but how could they when Ras Thavas himself with his own eyes saw them fly off in the Pinsar before dawn this day and disappear in the east?"

"Right you are, Bal Zak," agreed the other, "and it were a waste of time to search your ship. Come men, to our own!"

I could feel the muscles about my heart relax with the receding footfalls of Vobis Kan's warriors as they quit the deck of the Vosar for their own ship and my spirits rose with the renewed purring of our own motor as Ras Thavas' flier again got under way. Gor Hajus bent his lips close to my ear.

"THE spirits of our ancestors smile upon us," he whispered. "It is night and the darkness will aid in covering our escape from the ship and the landing stage."

"What makes you think it is night?" I asked.

"Vobis Kan's ship was close by when it hailed and asked our name. By daylight it could have seen what ship we were."

He was right. We had been locked in that stuffy hole since before dawn and while I had thought it had been for a considerable time I also had realized that the darkness and the inaction and the nervous strain would tend to make it seem much longer than it really had been, so that I would not have been greatly surprised had we made Toonol by daylight.

The distance from the Tower of Thavas to Toonol is inconsiderable so that shortly after Vobis Kan's ship had spoken to us we came to rest upon the landing stage at our destination. For a long time we waited, listening to the sounds of movement aboard the ship and wondering, upon my part at least, as to what the intentions of the captain might be. It was quite possible that Bal Zak might return to Thavas this same night, especially if he had come to Toonol to fetch a rich or powerful patient to the laboratories; but if he had come only for supplies he might well lie here until the morrow. This much I had learned from Gor Hajus, my own knowledge of the movements of the fliers of Ras Thavas being considerably less than nothing, for, though I had been months a lieutenant of the master surgeon, I had learned only the day before of the existence of his small fleet, it being according to the policy of Ras Thavas to tell me nothing unless the telling of it coincided with and furthered his own plans. Questions which I asked he always answered, if he reasoned that the effects would not be harmful to his own interests, but he volunteered nothing that he did not particularly wish me to know, and the fact that there were no windows in the outside walls of the buildings facing toward Toonol, that I had never before the previous day been upon the roof and that I never had seen a ship sail over the inner court

toward the east all tended to explain my ignorance of the fleet and its customary operations.

We waited quietly until silence fell upon the ship, betokening either that the crew had retired for the night or that they had gone down into the city and then, after a whispered consultation with Gor Hajus, we decided to make an attempt to leave the flier at once. It was our purpose to seek a hiding place within the tower of the landing stage from which we might investigate possible avenues of escape into the city either at once or upon the morrow when we might more easily mix with the crowd that Gor Hajus said would certainly be in evidence from a few hours after sun rise.

Cautiously I opened the door of our closet and looked into the main cabin beyond. It lay in darkness. Silently we filed out. The silence of the tomb lay upon the flier, but from far below arose the subdued noises of the city. So far, so good! and then, without sound, without warning, a burst of brilliant light illuminated the interior of the cabin. I felt my fingers tighten upon my sword hilt as I glanced quickly about.

Directly opposite us, in the narrow doorway of a small cabin, stood a tall man whose handsome harness betokened the fact that he was no common warrior. In either hand he held a heavy Barsoomian pistol into the muzzles of which we found ourselves staring.

CHAPTER VIII.

Hands Up!

IN quiet tones he spoke the words of the Barsoomian equivalent of our earthly *hands up!* The shadow of a grim smile touched his lips and as he saw us hesitate to obey his commands, he spoke again.

"Do as I tell you and you will be well off. Keep perfect silence. A raised voice may spell your doom; a pistol shot most assuredly."

Gor Hajus raised his hands above his head and we others followed his example.

"I am Bal Zak," announced the stranger. My heart slumped.

"Then you had better commence firing," said Gor Hajus, "for you will not take us alive and we are four to one."

"Not so fast, Gor Hajus," admonished the captain of the Vosar, "until you learn what is in my mind."

"That we already know for we heard you speak of the large reward that awaited the captor of Vad Varo and Gor Hajus," snapped the assassin of Toonol.

"Had I craved that reward so much I could have turned you over to the dwar of Vobis Kan's ship when he boarded us," said Bal Zak.

"You did not know we were aboard the Vosar then," I reminded him.

"Ah, but I did."

Gor Hajus snorted his disbelief.

"How then," Bal Zak reminded us, "was I able to be ready upon this very spot when you emerged from your hiding place? Yes, I knew that you were aboard."

"But how?" demanded Dar Tarus.

"It is immaterial," replied Bal Zak, "but to satisfy your natural curiosity I will tell you that I have quarters in a small room in the Tower of Thavas, my windows overlook the roof and the hangar, my long life spent aboard fliers has made me very sensitive to every sound of a ship—motors changing their speed will awaken me in the dead of night, as quickly as will their starting or their stopping—I was awakened by the starting of the motors of the Pinsar, I saw three of you upon the roof and the fourth drop from the deck of the flier as she started and

my judgment told me that the ship was being sent out unmanned for some reason of which I had no knowledge. It was too late for me to prevent the act and so I waited in silence to learn what would follow. I saw you hasten into the hangar and I heard Ras Thavas' hail and your reply and then I saw you board the Vosar. Immediately I descended to the roof and ran noiselessly to the hangar, apprehending that you intended making away with this ship; but there was no one about the controls and from a tiny port in the control room, through which one has a view of the main cabin, I saw you enter that closet. I was at once convinced that your only purpose was to stow away for Toonol and consequently, aside from keeping an eye upon your hiding place, I went about my business as though you were not here."

"And you did not advise Ras Thavas?" I asked.

"I advised no one," he replied. "Years ago I learned to mind my own business, to see all, to hear all and to tell nothing unless it profited me to do so."

"But you said that the reward is high for our apprehension," Gor Hajus reminded him. "Would it not be profitable to collect it?"

"There are in the breasts of honorable men," replied Bal Zak, "forces that rise superior to the lust for gold and while Toonolians are supposedly a people free from the withering influences of sentiment yet I for one am not totally unconscious of the demands of gratitude. Six years ago, Gor Hajus, you refused to assassinate my father, holding that he was a good man, worthy to live and one that had once befriended you slightly. Today, through his son, you reap your reward and in some measure are repaid for the punishment that was meted out to you by Vobis Kan because of your refusal to slay the sire of Bal Zak. I have sent my crew away that none aboard the Vosar but myself might have knowledge of your presence. Tell me your plans and command me in what way I may be of further service to you."

"We wish to reach the streets, unobserved," replied Gor Hajus. "Can you but help us in that we shall not put upon your shoulders further responsibility for our escape. You have our gratitude and in Toonol, I need not remind you, the gratitude of Gor Hajus is a possession that even the jeddak has craved."

"Your problem is complicated," said Bal Zak, after a moment of thought, "by the personnel of your party. The ape would immediately attract attention and arouse suspicion. Knowing much of Ras Thavas' experiments I realized at once this morning, after watching him with you, that he had the brain of a man; but this very fact would attract to him and to you the closer attention of the masses."

"I do not need acquaint them with the fact," growled Hovan Du in his savage tones. "To them I need be but a captive ape. Are such unknown in Toonol?"

"Not entirely, though they are rare," replied Bal Zak; "but there is also the white skin of Vad Varo. Ras Thavas appears to have known nothing of the presence of the ape with you, but he full well knew of Vad Varo and your description has been spread by every means at his command. You would be recognized immediately by the first Toonolian that laid eyes upon you, and then there is Gor Hajus. He has been dead for six years yet I venture there is scarce a Toonolian that broke the shell prior to ten years ago who does not know the face of Gor Hajus as well as he knows that of his own mother. The jeddak himself was not better known to the people of Toonol than Gor Hajus. That leaves but one who might possibly escape suspicion and detection in the streets of Toonol."

"If we could but obtain weapons for these others," I suggested, "we might even under these great handicaps reach the house of Gor Hajus' friend."

"Fight your way through the city of Toonol?" demanded Bal Zak.

"If there is no other way, we should have to," I replied.

"I admire the will," commented the commander of the Vosar, "but fear that the flesh is without sufficient strength. Wait! there is a way—perhaps. On the stage just below this there is a public depot where equilibrimotors are kept and rented. Could we find the means to obtain four of these there would be a chance at least for you to elude the air patrols and reach the house of Gor Hajus' friend and I think I see a way to the accomplishment of that. The landing tower is closed for the night but there are several watchmen distributed through it at different levels. There is one at the equilibrimotor depot and, as I happen to know, he is a devotee of *jetan*—he would rather play *jetan* than attend to his duties as watchman. I often remain aboard the Vosar at night and occasionally he and I indulge in a game. I will ask him up tonight and while he is thus engaged you may go to the depot, help yourselves to equilibrimotors and pray to your ancestors that no air patrol suspicions you as you cross the city toward your destination. What think you of this plan, Gor Hajus?"

"It is splendid," replied the assassin; "and you, Vad Varo?"

"If I knew what an equilibrimotor is I might be in a better position to judge the merits of the plan," I replied; "though I am satisfied to abide by the judgment of Gor Hajus. I can assure you, Bal Zak, of our great appreciation and as Gor Hajus has put the stamp of his approval upon your plan I can only urge you to arrange that we may put it into effect with as little delay as possible."

"Good!" exclaimed Bal Zak. "Come with me and I will conceal you until I have lured the watchman to the *jetan* game within my cabin. After that your fate will be in your own hands."

We followed him from the ship onto the deck of the landing stage and close under the side of the Vosar opposite that from which the watchman must approach the ship and enter it. Then, bidding us good luck, Bal Zak departed.

From the summit of the landing tower I had my first view of a Martian city. Several hundred feet below me lay spread the broad, well lighted avenues of Toonol, many of which were crowded with people. Here and there, in this central district, a building was raised high upon its supporting, cylindrical metal shaft, while further out, where the residences predominated the city took on the appearance of a colossal and grotesque forest. Among the larger palaces only an occasional suite of rooms was thus raised high above the level of the others, these being the sleeping apartments of the owners, their servants or their guests; but the smaller homes were raised in their entirety, a precaution necessitated by the constant activity of the followers of Gor Hajus' ancient profession that permitted no man to be free from the constant menace of assassination. Throughout the central district the sky was pierced by the lofty towers of several other landing stages; but, as I was later to learn, these were comparatively few in number, since Toonol is in no sense a flying nation, supporting no such enormous fleets of merchant ships and vessels of war as, for example, the twin cities of Helium or the great capitol of Ptarth.

A peculiar feature of the street lighting of Toonol (and in fact the same condition applies to the lighting of other Barsoomian cities I have visited) I noted for the first time that night as I waited upon the landing stage for the re-

turn of Bal Zak with the watchman to the interior of the Vosar. The luminosity below me seemed confined directly to the area to be lighted—there was no diffusion of light upward or beyond the limits the lamps were designed to light and this was effected, I was told, by lamps designed upon principles resulting from ages of investigation of the properties of light waves and the laws governing them which permit Barsoomian scientists to confine and control light as we confine and control matter. The light waves leave the lamp, pass along a prescribed circuit and return to the lamp—there is no waste nor, strange this seemed to me, are there any dense shadows when lights are properly installed and adjusted, for the waves in passing around objects to return to the lamp illuminate all sides of them.

The effect of this lighting from the great height of the tower was rather remarkable. The night was dark, there being no moons at that hour upon this night, and the effect was that obtained when sitting in a darkened auditorium and looking upon a brilliantly lighted stage. I was still intent upon watching the life and color beneath when we heard Bal Zak returning and that he had been successful in his mission was apparent from the fact that he was conversing with another.

Five minutes later we crept quietly from our hiding place and descended to the stage below where lay the equilibrimotor depot. As theft is practically unknown upon Barsoom, except for purposes entirely dissociated from a desire to obtain pecuniary profit through the thing stolen, no precautions are taken against theft. We therefore found the doors of the depot open and Gor Hajus and Dar Tarus had quickly selected four equilibrimotors and adjusted them upon us. They consist of a broad belt, not unlike the life belt used aboard transoceanic liners upon Earth, these belts being filled with the eighth Barsoomian ray, or ray of propulsion, to a sufficient degree to just about equalize the pull of gravity and thus to maintain a person in equilibrium between that force and the opposite force exerted by the eighth ray. Permanently attached to the back of the belt is a small radium motor, the controls for which are upon the front of the belt. Rigidly attached to and projecting from each side of the upper rim of the belt is a strong, light wing with small hand levers for quickly altering their positions.

Gor Hajus quickly explained the method of control, but I could apprehend that there might be embarrassment and trouble awaiting me before I mastered the art of flying in an equilibrimotor. He showed me how to tilt the wings downward in walking so that I would not leave the ground at every step and thus he led me to the edge of the landing stage.

"We will rise here," he said, "and keeping in the darkness of the upper levels seek to reach the house of my friend without being detected. If we are pursued by air patrol we must separate and later those who escape may gather just west of the city wall where you will find a small lake with a deserted tower upon its northern rim—this tower will be our rendezvous in event of trouble. Follow me!" and he started his motor and rose gracefully into the air.

Hovan Du followed him and then it was my turn. I rose beautifully for about twenty feet, floating out over the city which lay hundreds of feet below, and then, quite suddenly, I turned upsidedown. I had done something wrong—I was quite positive of it. It was a most startling sensation. I can assure you, floating there with my head down, quite helpless, while below me lay the streets of a great city and no softer. I was sure, than the streets of Los Angeles or Paris. My motor was still going and as I manipulated the control which operated the wings I commenced to describe all sorts of strange loops and spirals and spins; and then Dar Tarus came to my rescue. First he

told me to lie quietly and then directed the manipulation of each wing until I had gained an upright position. After that I did fairly well and was soon rising in the wake of Gor Hajus and Hovan Du.

I need not describe in detail the hours of flying, or rather floating, that ensued. Gor Hajus led us to a considerable altitude and there, through the darkness above the city, our slow motors drove us toward a district of magnificent homes surrounded by spacious grounds and here, as we hovered over a large palace, we were suddenly startled by a sharp challenge coming from directly above us.

"Who flies by night?" demanded the owner of the voice.

"Friends of Mu Tel, Prince of the House of Kan," replied Gor Hajus quickly.

"Let me see your night flying permit and your flier's license," ordered the one above us, at the same time swooping suddenly to our level and giving me my first sight of a Martian policeman. He was equipped with a much swifter and handier equilibrimotor than ours. I think that was the first fact to impress us deeply and it demonstrated the futility of flight, for he could have given us ten minutes start and overhauled each of us within another ten minutes even though we had elected to fly in different directions. The fellow was a warrior rather than a policeman though detailed to duty such as our earthly police officers perform, the city being patrolled both day and night by the warriors of Vobis Kan's army.

He dropped now close to the assassin of Toonol, again demanding permit and license and at the same time flashing a light in the face of my comrade. Instantly he voiced an exclamation of surprise and satisfaction.

"By the sword of the jeddak!" he cried. "Fortune heaps her favors upon me. Who would have thought an hour since that it would be I who would collect the reward for the capture of Gor Hajus?"

"ANY other fool might have thought it," returned Gor Hajus, "but he would have been as wrong as you," and as he spoke he struck with the short-sword I had loaned him.

The blow was broken by the wing of the warrior's equilibrimotor, which it demolished, yet it inflicted a severe wound in the fellow's shoulder. He tried to back off, but the damaged wing caused him to only wheel around erratically and then he seized upon his whistle and attempted to blow a mighty blast that was cut short by another blow from Gor Hajus' sword that split the man's head open to the bridge of his nose.

"Quick!" cried the assassin. "We must drop into the gardens of Mu Tel for that signal will bring a swarm of air patrols about our heads."

The others I saw falling rapidly toward the ground, but again I had trouble. Depress my wings as I would I moved only very slightly downward and upon a path that, if continued, would have landed me at a considerable distance from the gardens of Mu Tel. I was approaching one of the elevated portions of the palace; what appeared to be a small suite that was raised upon its shining metal shaft far above the ground. From all directions I could hear the screaming whistles of the air patrols answering the last call of their comrade whose corpse floated just above me, a guide even in death to point the way for his fellows to search us out. They were sure to discover him and then I would be in plain view of them and my fate sealed.

But perhaps I could find ingress to the apartments looming darkly near! There I might hide until the danger had passed, provided I could enter, undetected. I di-



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rected my course toward the structure; an open window took form through the darkness and then I collided with a fine wire netting—I had run into a protecting curtain that fends off assassins of the air from these high flung sleeping apartments. I felt that I was lost. If I could but reach the ground I might find concealment among the trees and shrubbery that I had seen vaguely outlined beneath me in the gardens of this Barsoomian prince; but I could not drop at a sufficient angle to bring me to ground

within the garden and when I tried to spiral down I turned over and started up again. I thought of ripping open my belt and letting the eighth ray escape; but in my unfamiliarity with this strange force I feared that such an act might precipitate me to the ground with too great violence, though I was determined to have recourse to it as a last alternative if nothing less drastic presented itself.

In my last attempt to spiral downward I rose rapidly feet foremost to a sudden and surprising collision with

some object above me and as I frantically righted myself, fully expecting to be immediately seized by a member of the air patrol, I found myself face to face with the corpse of the warrior Gor Hajus had slain. The whistling of the air patrols sounded ever nearer—it could be only a question of seconds now before I was discovered—and with the stern necessity that confronted me, with death looking me in the face, there burst upon me a possible avenue of escape from my dilemma.

Seizing tightly with my left hand the harness of the dead Toonolian, I whipped out my dagger and slashed his buoyancy belt a dozen times. Instantly, as the rays escaped, his body started to drag me downward. Our descent was rapid, but not precipitate and it was but a matter of seconds before we landed gently upon the scarlet sward of the gardens of Mu Tel, Prince of the House of Kan, close beside a clump of heavy shrubbery. Above me sounded the whistles of the circling patrols as I dragged the corpse of the warrior into the concealing depth of the foliage. Nor was I an instant too soon for safety, for almost immediately the brilliant rays of a search light shot downward from the deck of a small patrol ship, illuminating the open spaces of the garden all about me. A hurried glance through the branches and the leaves of my sanctuary revealed nothing of my companions and I breathed a sigh of relief in the thought that they, too, had found concealment.

The light played for a short time about the gardens and then passed on, as did the sound of the patrol's whistles, as the search proceeded elsewhere, thus giving me the assurance that no suspicion was directed upon our hiding place.

Left in darkness I appropriated such of the weapons of the dead warrior as I coveted after having removed my equilibrimotor, which I was first minded to destroy, but which I finally decided to moor to one of the larger shrubs against the possibility that I might again have need for it. And now, secure in the conviction that the danger of discovery by the air patrol had passed, I left my concealment and started in search of my companions.

Keeping well in the shadows of the trees and shrubs I moved in the direction of the main building, which loomed darkly near at hand, for in this direction I believed Gor Hajus would lead the others, since I knew the palace of Mu Tel was to have been our destination. As I crept along, moving with utmost stealth, Thuria, the nearer moon, shot suddenly above the horizon, illuminating the night with her brilliant rays. I was close to the building's ornately carved wall at the moment; beside me was a narrow niche, its interior cast in deepest shadow by Thuria's brilliant rays; to my left was an open bit of lawn upon which, revealed in every detail of its terrifying presence, stood as fearsome a creature as my earthly eyes had rested upon. It was a beast about the size of a Shetland pony, with ten short legs and a terrifying head that bore some slight resemblance to that of a frog, except that the jaws were equipped with three rows of long, sharp tusks.

The thing had its nose in the air and was sniffing about, while its great pop eyes moved swiftly here and there, assuring me, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that it was searching for someone. I am not inclined to be egotistical, yet I could not avoid the conviction that it was searching for me. It was my first experience of a Martian watchdog and, as I sought concealment within the dark shadows of the niche behind me, at the very instant that the creature's eyes alighted upon me, and heard his growl and saw him charge straight toward me, I had a premonition that it might prove my last experience of one.

I drew my long-sword as I backed into the niche, but with a sense of the utter inadequacy of the unaccustomed

weapon in the face of this three or four hundred pounds of ferocity incarnate. Slowly I backed away into the shadows as the creature bore down upon me and then, as it entered the niche, my back collided with a solid obstacle that put an end to further retreat.

CHAPTER IX.

The Palace of Mu Tel

As the calot entered the niche, I experienced all of the reactions of the cornered rat and I certainly know that I set myself to fight in that proverbial manner. The beast was almost upon me and I was metaphorically kicking myself for not having remained in the open where there were many tall trees when the support at my back suddenly gave way, a hand reached out of the darkness behind me and seized my harness and I was drawn swiftly into inky blackness. A door slammed and the silhouette of the calot against the moonlit entrance to the niche was blotted out.

A gruff voice spoke in my ear. "Come with me!" it said. A hand found mine and thus I was led along through the darkness of what I soon discovered was a narrow corridor judging from the constantly recurring collisions I had first with one side of it and then with the other.

Ascending gradually, the corridor turned abruptly at right angles and I saw beyond my guide a dim luminosity that gradually increased until another turn brought us to the threshold of a brilliantly lighted chamber—a magnificent apartment, the gorgeous furnishings and decorations of which beggar the meagre descriptive powers of my native tongue. Gold, ivory, precious stones, marvellous woods, resplendent fabrics, gorgeous furs and startling architecture combined to impress upon my earthly vision such a picture as I had not ever even dreamed of dreaming, and in the center of this room, surrounded by a little group of Martians, were my three companions.

My guide conducted me toward the party, the members of which had turned toward us as we entered the chamber, and stopped before a tall Barsoomian, resplendent in jewel encrusted harness.

"Prince," he said, "I was scarce a *tal* too soon. In fact, as I opened the door to step out into the garden in search of him, as you directed, there he was upon the opposite side with one of the calots of the garden almost upon him."

"Good!" exclaimed he who had been addressed as Prince, and then he turned to Gor Hajus. "This is he, my friend, of whom you told me?"

"This is Vad Varo, who claims to be from the planet Jasoom," replied Gor Hajus; "and this, Vad Varo, is Mu Tel, Prince of the House of Kan."

I bowed and the prince advanced and placed his right hand upon my left shoulder in true Barsoomian acknowledgement of an introduction; when I had done similarly, the ceremony was over. There was no silly pleased-to-meet-you, How-do-you-do? or it's-a-pleasure-I-assure-you.

At Mu Tel's request I narrated briefly what had befallen me between the time I had become separated from my companions and the moment that one of his officers had snatched me from impending disaster. Mu Tel gave instructions that all traces of the dead patrol be removed before dawn lest their discovery bring upon him the further suspicion of his uncle, Vobis Kan, Jeddak of Toonol, who it seemed had long been jealous of his nephew's growing popularity and fearful that he harbored aspirations for his throne.

It was later in the evening, during one of those elaborate meals for which the princes of Barsoom are justly

famous, when mellowed slightly by the rare vintages with which he delighted his guests, that Mu Tel discoursed with less restraint upon his imperial uncle.

"The nobles have long been tired of Vobis Kan," he said, "and the people are tiring of him—he is a conscienceless tyrant—but he is our hereditary ruler, and so they hesitate to change. We are a practical people, little influenced by sentiment, yet there is enough to keep the masses loyal to their jeddak even after he has ceased to deserve their loyalty, while the fear of the wrath of the masses keeps the nobles loyal. There is also the natural suspicion that I, the next in line for succession, would make them no less tyrannical a jeddak than has Vobis Kan, while, having youth, I might be much more active in cruel and nefarious practices.

"For myself, I would not hesitate to destroy my uncle and seize his throne were I sure of the support of the army, for with the warriors of Vobis Kan at my back I might defy the balance of Toonol. It is because of this that I long since offered my friendship to Gor Hajus, not that he slay my uncle, but that when I had slain him in fair fight Gor Hajus might win to me the loyalty of the jeddak's warriors, for great is the popularity of Gor Hajus among the soldiers, who ever look up to such a great fighter with reverence and devotion. I have offered Gor Hajus a high place in the affairs of Toonol should he cast his lot with mine; but he tells me that he has first to fulfill his obligations to you, Vad Varo, and for the furtherance of your adventure he has asked me to give you what assistance I may. This I offer gladly, from purely practical motives, since your early success will hasten mine, and therefore I propose to place at your disposal a staunch flier that will carry you and your companions to Phundahl."

This offer I naturally accepted, after which we fell to discussing plans for our departure, which we finally decided to attempt early the following night, at a time when neither of the moons would be in the heavens, and after a brief discussion of equipment we were, at my request, permitted to retire, since I had not slept for more than thirty-six hours and my companions for twenty-four.

Slaves conducted us to our sleeping apartments, which were luxuriously furnished, and arranged magnificent sleeping silks and furs for our comfort. After they had left us Gor Hajus touched a button and the room rose swiftly upon its metal shaft to a height of forty or fifty feet; the wire netting automatically dropped about us, and we were safe for the night.

THE next morning, after our apartment had been lowered to its daylight level and before I was permitted to leave it, a slave was sent to me by Mu Tel with instructions to stain my entire body the beautiful copper-red of my Barsoomian friends, furnishing me with a disguise which I well knew to be highly essential to the success of my venture, since my white skin would have drawn unpleasant notice upon me in any city of Barsoom. Another slave brought harness and weapons for Gor Hajus, Dar Tarus and myself and a collar and chain for Hovan Du, the ape-man. Our harness, while of heavy material and splendid workmanship was quite plain, being free of all insignia either of rank or service—such harness as is customarily worn by the Barsoomian *panthan*, or soldier of fortune, at such times as he is not definitely in the service of any nation or individual. These *panthans* are virtually men without a country, being roving mercenaries ready to sell their swords to the highest bidder. Although they have no organization they are ruled by a severe code of ethics and while in the employ of a master are, almost without exception, loyal to him. They are generally supposed to be men who have flown from the wrath of their own jeddaks or the justice of their own courts, but there is among

them a sprinkling of adventurous souls who have adopted this calling because of the thrills and excitement it offers. While they are well paid they are also great gamblers and notorious spenders, with the result that they are almost always without funds and often reduced to strange expedients for the gaining of their livelihoods between engagements, a fact which gave great plausibility to our possession of a trained ape, which upon Mars would appear no more remarkable than would to us the possession of a monkey or parrot by an old salt just returned, from a long cruise, to one of our Earthly ports.

This day that I spent in the palace of Mu Tel I spent much in the company of the prince, who found pleasure in questioning me concerning the customs, the politics, the civilization and the geography of Earth, with much of which, I was surprised to note, he seemed quite familiar, a fact which he explained was due to the marvellous development of Barsoomian astronomical instruments, wireless photography and wireless telephony, the last of which has been brought to such a state of perfection that many Barsoomian savants have succeeded in learning several Earthly languages, notably Urdu, English and Russian, and, a few, Chinese also. These have doubtless been the first languages to attract their attention because of the fact that they are spoken by great numbers of people over large areas of the world.

Mu Tel took me to a small auditorium in his palace that reminded me somewhat of private projection rooms on Earth. It had, I should say, a capacity of some two hundred persons and was built like a large camera obscura, the audience sitting within the instrument, their backs toward the lens and in front of them, filling one entire end of the room, a large ground glass upon which was thrown the image to be observed.

Mu Tel seated himself at a table upon which was a chart of the heavens. Just above the chart was a movable arm carrying a pointer. This pointer Mu Tel moved until it rested upon the planet Earth, then he switched off the light in the room and immediately there appeared upon the ground glass plate a view such as one might obtain from an aeroplane riding at an elevation of a thousand feet. There was something strangely familiar about the scene before me. It was of a desolate, wasted country. I saw shattered stumps whose orderly arrangement proclaimed that here once an orchard had blossomed and borne fruit. There were great, unsightly holes in the earth and over and across all a tangle of barbed wire. I asked Mu Tel how we might change the picture to another locality. He lighted a small radio bulb between us and I saw a globe there, a globe of Earth, and a small pointer fixed over it.

"The side of this globe now presented to you represents the face of the Earth turned toward us," explained Mu Tel. "You will note that the globe is slowly revolving. Place this pointer where you will upon the globe and that portion of Jasoom will be revealed for you."

I MOVED the pointer slowly and the picture changed. A ruined village came into view. I saw some people moving among its ruins. They were not soldiers. A little further on I came upon trenches and dug-outs—there were no soldiers here, either. I moved the pointer rapidly north and south along a vast line of trenches. Here and there in villages there were soldiers, but they were all French soldiers and never were they in the trenches. There were no German soldiers and no fighting. The war was over, then! I moved the pointer to the Rhine and across. There were soldiers in Germany—French soldiers, English soldiers, American soldiers. We had won the war! I was glad, but it seemed very far away and quite unreal—as though no such world existed and no such people had ever fought—it was as though I was recalling through its illustrations a novel that I had read a long time since.

"You seem much interested in that war torn country," remarked Mu Tel.

"Yes," I explained, "I fought in that war. Perhaps I was killed. I do not know."

"And you won?" he asked.

"Yes, my people won," I replied. "We fought for a great principle and for the peace and happiness of a world—I hope that we did not fight in vain."

"If you mean that you hope that your principle will triumph because you fought and won, or that peace will come, your hopes are futile. War never brought peace—it but brings more and greater wars. War is Nature's natural state—it is folly to combat it. Peace should be considered only as a time for preparation for the principal business of man's existence. Were it not for constant warring of one form of life upon another and even upon itself the planets would be so overrun with life that it would smother itself out. We found upon Barsoom that long periods of peace brought plagues and terrible diseases that killed more than the wars killed and in a much more hideous and painful way. There is neither pleasure nor thrill nor reward of any sort to be gained by dying in bed of a loathsome disease. We must all die—let us therefore go out and die in a great exciting game and make room for the millions who are to follow us. We have tried it out upon Barsoom and we would not be without war."

Mu Tel told me much that day about the peculiar philosophy of Toonolians. They believe that no good deed was ever performed except for a selfish motive; they have no god and no religion; they believe, as do all educated Barsoomians, that man came originally from The Tree of Life, but unlike most of their fellows they do not believe that an omnipotent being created the Tree of Life. They hold that the only sin is failure—success, however achieved, is meritorious, and yet, paradoxical as it may seem, they never break their given word. Mu Tel explained that they overcame the baneful results of this degrading weakness—this sentimental bosh—by seldom if ever binding themselves to loyalty to another and then only for a definitely prescribed period.

As I came to know them better, and especially Gor Hajus, I began to realize that much of their flaunted contempt of the finer sensibilities was specious. It is true that generations of inhibition had to some extent atrophied those characteristics of heart and soul which the noblest among us so highly esteem; that friendship's ties were lax and that blood kinship awakened no high sense of responsibility or love even between parents and children, yet Gor Hajus was essentially a man of sentiment, though he would doubtless have run through the heart any who had dared accuse him of it, thus perfectly proving the truth of the other's accusation. His pride in his reputation for integrity and loyalty proved him a man of heart as truly as did his jealousy of his reputation for heartlessness prove him a man of sentiment; and in all this he was but typical of the people of Toonol. They denied deity and in the same breath worshipped the fetish of science that they had permitted to obsess them quite as harmfully as do religious fanatics accept the unreasoning rule of their imaginary gods; and so, with all their vaunted knowledge, they were unintelligent because unbalanced.

AS the day drew to a close I became more anxious to be away. Far to the west across desolate leagues of marsh lay Phundahl and in Phundahl the beautiful body of the girl I loved and that I was sworn to restore to its rightful owner. The evening meal was over and Mu Tel himself had conducted us to a secret hangar in one of the towers of his palace. Here artisans had prepared a flier for us, having removed during the day all signs of its real

ownership, even to slightly altering its lines, so that in the event of capture Mu Tel's name might in no way be connected with the expedition. Provisions were stored, including plenty of raw meat for Hovan Du, and, as the farther moon sank below the horizon and darkness fell, a panel of the tower wall, directly in front of the flier's nose, slid aside, Mu Tel wished us luck and the ship slipped silently out into the night. The flier, like many of her type, was without cockpit or cabin; a low, metal hand-rail surmounted her gunwale; heavy rings were set substantially in her deck and to these her crew were supposed to cling or attach themselves by means of their harness hooks provided for this and similar purposes; a low wind shield, with a rakish slant, afforded some protection from the wind; the motor and controls were all exposed as all the space below decks was taken up by the buoyancy tanks. In this type everything is sacrificed to speed; there is no comfort aboard. When moving at high speed each member of the crew lies extended at full length upon the deck, each in his allotted place to give the necessary trim, and hangs on for dear life. These Toonolian crafts, however, are not overly fast, so I was told, being far outstripped in speed by the fliers of such nations as Helium and Ptarth who have for ages devoted themselves to the perfection of their navies; but this one was quite fast enough for our purposes to the consummation of which it would be pitted against fliers of no higher rating, and it was certainly fast enough for me and, by comparison with the slow moving Vosar, it seemed to shoot through the air like an arrow.

We wasted no time in strategy or stealth, but opened her wide as soon as we were in the clear and directed her straight toward the west and Phundahl, and scarcely had we passed over the gardens of Mu Tel when we met with our first adventure. We shot by a solitary figure floating in the air and almost simultaneously there shrilled forth the warning whistle of an air patrol, a shot whistled above us harmlessly and we were gone; but within a few seconds I saw the rays of a search light shining down from above and moving searchingly to and fro through the air.

"A PATROL boat!" shouted Gor Hajus. Hovan Du growled savagely and shook the chain upon his collar. We raced on, trusting to the big gods and the little gods and all our ancestors that those relentless eyes of light would not find us out; but it did. Within a few seconds it fell full upon our deck from above and in front of us and there it clung as the patrol boat dropped rapidly toward us while it maintained a high rate of speed upon a course otherwise identical with ours. Then, to our consternation, it opened fire on us with explosive bullets. These projectiles contain a high explosive that is detonated by light rays when the opaque covering of the projectile is broken by impact with the target. It is therefore not at all necessary to make a direct hit for a shot to be effective. If the projectile strikes the ground or the deck of a vessel or any other solid substance near its target it does considerably more damage when fired at a group of men than if it should strike but one of them, since it will explode if its outer shell is broken, and kill or wound several, while if it enters the body of an individual the light rays cannot reach it and it accomplishes no more than a non-explosive bullet. Moonlight is not powerful enough to detonate this explosive and so projectiles fired at night, unless touched by the power rays of search lights, detonate at sun rise the following morning, making a battle-field a most unsafe place at that time even though the contending forces are no longer there, and, similarly they make the removal of unexploded projectiles from the bodies of the wounded a most ticklish operation which may well result in the instant death of both the patient and the surgeon.



....If I were the more agile jumper, Hovan Du far outclassed me in climbing, with the result that he reached the rail and was clambering over while my eyes were still below the level of the deck.

Dar Tarus at the controls turned the nose of our flier upward directly toward the patrol boat and at the same time shouted to us to concentrate our fire upon her propellers. For myself, I could see little but the blinding eye of the search light and at that I fired with the strange weapon to which I had received my first introduction but a few hours since when it was presented to my by Mu

Tel. To me that all-searching eye represented the greatest menace that confronted us and could we blind it the patrol boat would have no great advantage over us. So I kept my rifle straight upon it, my finger on the button that controlled the fire and prayed for a hit. Gor Hajus knelt at my side, his weapon spitting bullets at the patrol boat. Dar Tarus' hands were busy with the controls and

Hovan Du squatted in the bow and merely growled.

Suddenly Dar Tarus voiced an exclamation of alarm. "The controls are hit!" he shouted. "We can't alter our course—the ship is useless." At almost the same instant the search light was extinguished—one of my bullets evidently having found it. We were quite close to the enemy now and heard their shout of anger. Our own craft, out of control, was running swiftly toward the other. It seemed that if there was not a collision we should pass directly beneath the keel of their air patrol. I asked Dar Tarus if our ship was beyond repair.

"We could repair it if we had time," he replied, "but it would take hours and while we were thus delayed the whole air patrol force of Toonol would be upon us."

"Then we must have another ship," I said.

Dar Tarus laughed. "You are right, Vad Varo," he replied; "but where shall we find it?"

I pointed to the patrol boat. "We shall not have to look far."

Dar Tarus shrugged his shoulders. "Why not!" he exclaimed; "it would be a glorious fight and a worthy death."

Gor Hajus slapped me on the shoulder. "To the death, my captain!" he cried.

Hovan Du shook his chain and roared.

The two ships were rapidly approaching one another. We had stopped firing now for fear that we might disable the craft we hoped to use for our escape and for some reason the crew of the patrol ship had ceased firing at us—I never learned why. We were moving in a line that would bring us directly beneath the other ship and I determined to board her at all costs. I could see her keel boarding tackle slung beneath her ready to be lowered to the deck of a quarry when once her grappling hooks had seized the prey. Doubtless they were already manning the latter and as soon as we were beneath her the steel tentacles would reach down and seize us as her crew swarmed down the boarding tackle to our deck.

I called to Hovan Du and he crept back to my side where I whispered my instructions in his ear. When I was done he nodded his head with a low growl; then I cast off the harness hook that held men to the deck and the ape and I moved to our bow after I had issued brief, whispered instructions to Gor Hajus and Dar Tarus. We were now almost directly beneath the enemy craft; I could see the grappling hooks being prepared for lowering. Our bow ran beneath the stern of the other ship and the moment was at hand for which I had been waiting. Now, those upon the deck of the patrol boat could not see Hovan Du or me; the boarding tackle of the other ship swung fifteen feet above our heads; I whispered a word of command to the ape and simultaneously we crouched and sprang for the tackle. It may sound like a mad chance—failure meant almost certain death—but I felt that if two of us could reach the deck of the patrol boat while her crew was busy with the grappling gear it would be well worth the risk.

Gor Hajus had assured me that there would not be more than six men aboard the patrol ship, that one would be at the controls and the others manning the grappling hooks. It would be a most propitious time to gain a footing on the enemy's deck.

Hovan Du and I made our leaps and Fortune smiled upon us, though the huge ape but barely reached the tackle with one outstretched hand, while my earthly muscles carried me easily to my goal. Together we made our way rapidly toward the bow of the patrol craft and without hesitation, and as previously arranged, he clambered quickly up the starboard side and I the port. If I were the more agile jumper Hovan Du far outclassed me in climbing, with the result that he reached the rail and was clambering

over while my eyes were still below the level of the deck, which was, perhaps, a fortunate thing for me since, by chance, I had elected to gain the deck directly at a point where, unknown to me, one of the crew of the ship was engaged with the grappling hooks. Had his eyes not been attracted elsewhere by the shout of one of his fellows who was first to see Hovan Du's savage face rise above the gunwale he could have dispatched me with a single blow before ever I could have set foot upon the deck.

The ape had also come up directly in front of a Toonolian warrior and this fellow had let out a yell of surprise and sought to draw his sword, but the ape, for all his great bulk, was too quick for him and as my eyes topped the rail, I saw the mighty authropoid seize the unfortunate man by the harness, drag him to the side and hurl him to destruction far below. Instantly we were both over the rail and squarely on deck while the remaining members of the craft's crew, abandoning their stations, ran forward to overpower us. I think that the sight of the great, savage beast must have had a demoralizing effect upon them, for they hesitated, each seeming to be willing to accord his fellow the honor of first engaging us; but they did come on, though slowly, and this hesitation I was delighted to see for it accorded perfectly with the plan that I had worked out, which depended largely upon the success which might attend the efforts of Gor Hajus and Dar Tarus to reach the deck of the patrol when our craft had risen sufficiently close beneath the other to permit them to reach the boarding tackle, which we were, by the way, utilizing with reverse English, as one might say.

Gor Hajus had cautioned me to dispatch the man at the controls as quickly as possible, since his very first act would be to injure them the instant that there appeared any possibility that we might be successful in our attempt to take his ship, and so I ran quickly toward him and before he could draw I cut him down. There were now four against us and we waited for them to advance that we might gain time for our fellows to reach the deck.

The four moved slowly forward and were almost within striking distance when I saw Gor Hajus' head appear above the stern rail, quickly followed by that of Dar Tarus.

"Look!" I cried to the enemy, "and surrender," and I pointed astern.

One of them turned to look and what he saw brought an exclamation of surprise to his lips. "It is Gor Hajus," he cried, and then, to me: "What is your purpose with us if we surrender?"

"We have no quarrel with you," I replied. "We but wish to leave Toonol and go our way in peace—we shall not harm you."

He turned to his fellows while, at a sign from me, my three companions stopped their advance and waited. For a few minutes the four warriors conversed in low tones, then he who had first spoken addressed me.

"There are few Toonolians," he said, "who would not be glad to serve for Gor Hajus, whom we had thought long dead, but to surrender our ship to you would mean certain death for us when we reported our defeat at our headquarters. On the other hand were we to continue our defense most of us here upon the deck of this flier would be killed. If you can assure us that your plans are not aimed at the safety of Toonol I can make a suggestion that will afford an avenue of escape and safety for us all."

"We only wish to leave Toonol," I replied. "No harm can come to Toonol because of what I seek to accomplish."

"Good! and where do you wish to go?"

"That I may not tell you."

"You may trust us, if you accept my proposal," he assured me, "which is that we convey you to your destination, after which we can return to Toonol and report

that we engaged you and that after a long running fight, in which two of our number were killed, you eluded us in the darkness and escaped."

"Can we trust these men?" I asked, addressing my question to Gor Hajus, who assured me that we could, and thus the compact was entered into which saw us speeding rapidly toward Phundahl aboard one of Vobis Kan's own fliers.

CHAPTER X

Phundahl

THE following night the Toonolian crew set us down inside the wall of the city of Phundahl, following the directions of Dar Tarus who was a native of the city, and a warrior of the Jeddara's Guard and, prior to that, had seen service in Phundahl's navy. Then he was familiar with every detail of Phundahl's defenses and her system of patrols was evidenced by the fact that we landed without detection and that the Toonolian ship rose and departed apparently unnoticed.

Our landing place had been the roof of a low building built within and against the city wall and from this roof Dar Tarus led us down an inclined runway to the street, which, at this point, was quite deserted. The street was narrow and dark, being flanked upon one side by the low buildings built against the city wall and upon the other by higher buildings, some of which were windowless and none showing any light. Dar Tarus explained that he had chosen this point for our entrance because it was a district of storage houses and while a hive of industry during the day was always deserted at night, not even a watchman being required owing to the almost total absence of thievery upon Barsoom.

By devious and roundabout ways he led us finally to a section of second rate shops, eating places and hotels such as are frequented by the common soldiers, artisans and slaves, where the only attention we attracted was due to the curiosity aroused by Hovan Du. As we had not eaten since leaving Mu Tel's palace our first consideration was food. Mu Tel had furnished Gor Hajus with money, so that we had the means to gratify our wants. Our first stop was at a small shop where Gor Hajus purchased four or five pounds of throat steak for Hovan Du and then we repaired to an eating place of which Dar Tarus knew. At first the proprietor would not let us bring Hovan Du inside, but finally, after much argument, he permitted us to lock the great ape in an inner room where Hovan Du was forced to remain with his throat meat while we sat at table in the outer room. I will say for Hovan Du that he played his role well, nor was there once when the proprietor of the place, or any of his patrons, or the considerable crowd that gathered to listen to the altercation could have guessed that the body of the great, savage beast was animated by a human brain. It was really only when feeding or fighting that the simian half of Hovan Du's brain appeared to exercise any considerable influence upon him, yet there seemed little doubt that it always colored all his thoughts and actions, to some extent accounting for his habitual taciturnity and the quickness with which he was aroused to anger as well as to the fact that he never smiled, nor appeared to appreciate in any degree the humor of a situation. He assured me, however, that the human half of his brain not only appreciated but greatly enjoyed the lighter episodes and occurrences of our adventure and the witty stories and anecdotes related by Gor Hajus the Assassin but that his simian anatomy had developed no muscles wherewith to evidence physical expression of his mental reactions.

We dined heartily, though upon rough and simple fare, but were glad to escape the prying curiosity of the garrulous and gossiping proprietor, who plied us with so many

questions as to our past performances and future plans that Dar Tarus, who was our spokesman here, was hard put to it to quickly fabricate replies that would be always consistent. However, escape we did at last and once again in the street Dar Tarus set out to lead us to a public lodging house of which he knew. As we went we approached a great building of wondrous beauty in and out of which constant streams of people were pouring and when we were before it Dar Tarus asked us to wait without as he must enter and when I asked him why, he told me that this was a temple of Tur, the god worshipped by the people of Phundahl.

"I have been away for a long time," he said, "and have had no opportunity to do honor to my god. I shall not keep you waiting long. Gor Hajus, will you loan me a few pieces of gold?"

In silence the Toonolian took a few pieces of money from one of his pocket pouches and handed them to Dar Tarus, but I could see that it was only with difficulty that he hid an expression of contempt, since the Toonolians are atheists.

I asked Dar Tarus if I might accompany him into the temple, which seemed to please him very much and so we fell in with the stream approaching the broad entrance. Dar Tarus gave me two of the gold pieces that he had borrowed from Gor Hajus and told me to follow directly behind him and do whatever I saw him doing. Directly inside the main entrance, and spread entirely across it at intervals that permitted space for the worshippers to pass between them, was a line of priests, their entire bodies, including their heads and faces, covered by a mantle of white cloth. In front of each was a substantial stand upon which rested a cash drawer. As we approached one of these we handed him a piece of gold which he immediately changed into many pieces of lesser value, one of which we dropped into a box at his side, whereupon he made several passes with his hands above our heads, dipped one of his fingers into a bowl of dirty water which he rubbed upon the ends of our noses, mumbled a few words which I could not understand and turned to the next in line as we passed on to the interior of the great temple. Never have I seen such a gorgeous display of wealth and lavish ornamentation as confronted my eyes in this the first of the temples of Tur that it was my fortune to behold. The enormous floor was unbroken by a single pillar and arranged upon it at regular intervals were carved images resting upon gorgeous pedestals. Some of these images were of men and some of women and many of them were beautiful, and there were others of beasts and of strange, grotesque creatures and many of these were hideous indeed. The first we approached was that of a beautiful female figure and about the pedestal of this lay a number of men and women prone upon the floor against which they bumped their heads seven times and then arose and dropped a piece of money into a receptacle provided for that purpose, moving on then to another figure. The next that Dar Tarus and I visited was that of a man with the body of a *silian*, about the pedestal of which was arranged a series of horizontal wooden bars in concentric circles. The bars were about five feet from the floor and hanging from them by their knees were a number of men and women repeating monotonously over and over again, something that sounded to me like, *bibble-babble-blup*.

Dar Tarus and I swung to the bars like the others and mumbled the meaningless phrase for a minute or two, then we swung down, dropped a coin into the box, and moved on. I asked Dar Tarus what the words were that we had repeated and what they meant, but he said he did not know. I asked him if anyone knew, but he appeared shocked and said that such a question was sacrilegious and revealed a marked lack of faith. At the next figure we visited the people were all upon their hands and knees

crawling madly in a circle about the pedestal. Seven times around they crawled and then they arose and put some money in a dish and went their ways. At another the people rolled about, saying, "Tur is Tur; Tur is Tur; Tur is Tur," and dropping money in a golden bowl when they were done.

"WHAT god was that?" I whispered to Dar Tarus when we had quit this last figure. It had no head, and its eyes, nose and mouth were in the center of its belly.

"There is but one god," replied Dar Tarus, solemnly "and he is Tur!"

"Was that Tur?" I inquired.

"Silence, man!" whispered Dar Tarus. "They would tear you to pieces were they to hear such heresy."

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I exclaimed. "I did not mean to offend. I see now that that is merely one of your idols."

Dar Tarus clapped a hand over my mouth. "S-s-s-t!" he cautioned to silence. "We do not worship idols—there is but one god and he is Tur!"

"Well, what are these?" I insisted, with a sweep of a hand that embraced the several score images about which were gathered the thousands of worshippers.

"We must not ask," he assured me. "It is enough that we have faith that all the works of Tur are just and righteous. Come! I shall soon be through and we may join our companions."

He led me next to the figure of the monstrosity with a mouth that ran entirely around its head. It had a long tail and the breasts of a woman. About this image were a great many people, each standing upon his head. They also were repeating, over and over, "Tur is Tur; Tur is Tur; Tur is Tur." When we had done this for a minute or two, during which I had a devil of a time maintaining my equilibrium, we arose, dropped a coin into the box by the pedestal and moved on.

"We may go now," said Dar Tarus; "I have done well in the sight of Tur."

"I noticed," I remarked, "that the people repeated the same phrase before this figure that they did at the last—Tur is Tur."

"O, no," exclaimed Dar Tarus; "on the contrary they said just exactly the opposite from what they said at the other. At that they said, Tur is Tur; while at this they absolutely reversed it and said, Tur is Tur. Do you not see? they turned it right around backwards, which makes a very great difference."

"It sounded the same to me," I insisted.

"That is because you lack faith," he said sadly, and we passed out of the temple after depositing the rest of our money in a huge chest, of which there were many standing about almost filled with coins.

We found Gor Hajus and Hovan Du awaiting us impatiently, the center of a large and curious throng among which were many warriors in the metal of Xaxa the Jed-dara of Phundahl. They wanted to see Hovan Du perform, but Dar Tarus told them that he was tired and in an ugly mood.

"Tomorrow," he said, "when he is rested I shall bring him out upon the avenues to amuse you."

With difficulty we extricated ourselves and passing into a quieter avenue took a round-about way to the lodging place, where Hovan Du was confined in a small chamber while Gor Hajus, Dar Tarus and I were conducted by slaves to a large sleeping apartment where sleeping silks and furs were arranged for us upon a low platform that encircled the room and was broken only at the single entrance to the chamber. Here were already sleeping a considerable number of men, while two armed slaves patrolled the aisle to guard the guests from assassins.

It was still early and some of the other lodgers were conversing in low whispers so I sought to engage Dar Tarus in conversation relative to his religion, which, I must confess, had aroused my curiosity.

"The mysteries of religions always fascinate me, Dar Tarus," I told him.

"Ah, but that is the beauty of the religion of Tur," he explained; "it has no mysteries. It is simple, natural, scientific and every word and work of it is susceptible of proof through the pages of Turgan, the great book written by Tur himself."

"Tur's home is upon the Sun. There, one hundred thousand years ago, he made Barsoom and tossed it out into space, and then he amused himself by creating man in various forms and two sexes and later he fashioned animals to be food for man and each other and caused vegetation and water to appear that man and the animals might live. Do you not see how simple and scientific it all is?"

But it was Gor Hajus who told me the most about the religion of Tur one day when Dar Tarus was not about. He said that the Phundahlans maintained that Tur still created every living thing with his own hands. They denied vigorously that man possessed the power to reproduce his kind and taught their young that all such belief was vile and always they hid every evidence of natural procreation, insisting to the death that even those things which they witnessed with their own eyes and experienced with their own bodies in the bringing forth of their young never transpired.

Turgan taught them that Barsoom is flat and they shut their minds to every proof to the contrary. They would not leave Phundahl far for fear of falling off the edge of the world and they would not permit the development of aeronautics because should one of their ships circumnavigate Barsoom it would be a wicked sacrilege in the eyes of Tur who made Barsoom flat.

They would not permit the use of telescopes, for Tur taught them that there was no other world than Barsoom and to look at another would be heresy, nor would they permit the teaching in their schools of any history of Barsoom that antedated the creation of Barsoom by Tur, though Barsoom has a well authenticated written history that reaches back more than one hundred thousand years, nor would they permit any geography of Barsoom except that which appears in Turgan, nor any scientific research along biological lines. Turgan is their only text book—if it is not in Turgan it is a wicked lie.

But much of all this and a great deal more I gathered from one source or another during my brief stay in Phundahl, whose people are, I believe, the least advanced in civilization of any of the red nations upon Barsoom. Giving, as they do, all their best thought to religious matters they have become ignorant, bigoted and narrow, going as far to one extreme as the Toonolians to the other.

However, I had not come to Phundahl to investigate her culture but to steal her queen and that thought was uppermost in my mind when I awoke to a new day—my first in Phundahl. Following the morning meal we set out in the direction of the palace to reconnoiter, Dar Tarus leading us to a point from which he might easily direct us the balance of the way, as he did not dare accompany us to the immediate vicinity of the royal grounds for fear of recognition, the body he now possessed having formerly belonged to a well known noble.

It was arranged that Gor Hajus should act as spokesman and I as keeper of the ape and this arranged we bade farewell to Dar Tarus and set forth, the three of us, along a broad and beautiful avenue that led directly to the palace gates. We had been planning and rehearsing the parts that we were to play and which we hoped would

prove so successful that they would open the gates to us and win us to the presence of the jeddara.

As we strolled with seeming unconcern along the avenue I had ample opportunity to enjoy the novel and beautiful sights of this rich boulevard of palaces. The sun shone down upon vivid scarlet lawns, gorgeous flowered pimalia and a score of other rarely beautiful Barsoomian shrubs and trees, while the avenue itself was shaded by almost perfect specimens of the magnificent sorapus. The sleeping apartments of the buildings had all been lowered to their day-time level and from a hundred balconies gorgeous silks and furs were airing in the sun. Slaves were briskly engaged with their duties about the grounds, while upon many a balcony women and children sat at their morning meal. Among the children we aroused considerable enthusiasm, or at least Hovan Du did, nor was he without interest to the adults. Some of them would have detained us for an exhibition, but we moved steadily on toward the palace, for no where else had we business or concern within the walls of Phundahl.

Around the palace gates was the usual crowd of loitering curiosity seekers, for after all human nature is much the same everywhere, whether skins be black or white, red or yellow or brown, upon Earth or upon Mars. The crowd before Xaxa's gates was largely made up of visitors from the islands of that part of the Great Toonolian Marshes which owes allegiance to Phundahl's queen, and like all provincials eager for a glimpse of royalty, though none the less to be interested by the antics of a simian, wherefore we had a ready made audience awaiting our arrival. Their natural fear of the great brute caused them to fall back a little at our approach so that we had a clear avenue to the very gates themselves and there we halted while the crowd closed in behind, forming a half circle about us, and then Gor Hajus addressed them in a loud tone of voice that might be overheard by the warriors and their officers beyond the gates, for it was really them we had come to entertain, not the crowds in which we had not the slightest interest.

"Men and women of Phundahl," cried Gor Hajus; "behold two poor panthans, who, risking their lives, have captured and trained one of the most savage and ferocious and at the same time most intelligent specimens of the great white ape of Barsoom ever before seen in captivity and at great expense have brought it to Phundahl for your entertainment and edification. My friends, this wonderful ape is endowed with human intelligence; he understands every word that is spoken to him. With your kind attention, my friends, I will endeavor to demonstrate the remarkable intelligence of this ferocious, man-eating beast—an intelligence that has entertained the crowned heads of Barsoom and mystified the minds of her most learned savants."

I thought Gor Hajus did pretty well as a bally-hoo artist and I had to smile as I listened, here upon Mars, to the familiar lines that I had taught him out of my Earthly experience of county fairs and amusement parks, so highly ludicrous they sounded falling from the lips of The Assassin of Toonol; but they evidently interested his auditors and impressed them, too, for they craned their necks and stood in earnest eyed silence awaiting the performance of Hovan Du, and, even better, several members of the Jeddara's Guard pricked up their ears and sauntered toward the gates and among them was an officer.

Gor Hajus caused Hovan Du to lie down at word of command, to get up, to stand upon one foot and to indicate the number of fingers that Gor Hajus held up by growling once for each finger, thus satisfying the audience that he could count; but these simple things were only by way of leading up to the more remarkable achievements which we hoped would win an audience before the Jeddara.

Gor Hajus borrowed a set of harness and weapons from a man in the crowd and had Hovan Du don it and fence with him, and then indeed did we hear exclamations of amazement.

The warriors and the officer of Xaxa had drawn near the gates and were interested spectators, which was precisely what we wished, and now Gor Hajus was ready for the final, astounding revelation of Hovan Du's intelligence.

"These things that you have witnessed are as nothing," he cried; "why this wonderful beast can even read and write. He was captured in a deserted city near Ptarth and can read and write the language of that country. Is there among you one who, by chance, comes from that distant country?"

A slave spoke up. "I am from Ptarth."

"Good!" said Gor Hajus. "Write some simple instructions and hand them to the ape. I will turn my back that you may know that I cannot assist him in any way."

The slave drew forth a tablet from a pocket pouch and wrote briefly. What he wrote he handed to Hovan Du. The ape read the message and without hesitation moved quickly to the gate and handed it to the officer standing upon the other side, the gate being constructed of wrought metal in fanciful designs that offered no obstruction to the view or to the passage of small articles. The officer took the message and examined it.

"What does it say?" he demanded of the slave that had penned it.

"It says," replied the latter: "Take this message to the officer who stands just within the gates."

There were exclamations of surprise from all parts of the crowd and Hovan Du was compelled to repeat his performance several times with different messages which directed him to do various things, the officer always taking a great interest in the proceedings.

"It is marvellous," said he at last. "The Jeddara would be amused by the performance of this beast. Wait here, therefore, until I have sent word to her that she may, if she so desires, command your presence."

Nothing could have better suited us and so we waited with what patience we might for the messenger to return and while we waited Hovan Du continued to mystify his audience with new proofs of his great intelligence.

CHAPTER XI.

Xaxa

THE officer returned, the gates swung out and we were commanded to enter the courtyard of the palace of Xaxa, Jeddara of Phundahl. After that events transpired with great rapidity—surprising and totally unexpected events. We were led through an intricate maze of corridors and chambers until I became suspicious that we were purposely being confused and convinced that whether such was the intention or not the fact remained that I could no more have retraced my steps to the outer courtyard than I could have flown without wings. We had planned that, in the event of gaining admission to the palace, we would carefully note whatever might be essential to a speedy escape, but when, in a whisper, I asked Gor Hajus if he could find his way out again he assured me that he was as confused as I.

The palace was in no sense remarkable nor particularly interesting, the work of the Phundahlian artists being heavy and oppressing and without indication of high imaginative genius. The scenes depicted were mostly of a religious nature illustrating passages from Turgan, the Phundahlian bible, and, for the most part, were a series of monotonous repetitions. There was one, which ap-

peared again and again, depicting Turgan creating a round, flat Mars and hurling it into Space, that always reminded me of a culinary artist turning a flap jack in a Childs' window. There were also numerous paintings of what appeared to be court scenes delineating members of the Phundahl royal line in various activities and it was noticeable that the more recent ones in which Xaxa appeared had had the principal figure repainted so that there confronted me from time to time portraits, none too well done, of the beautiful face and figure of Valla Dia in the royal trappings of a jeddara. The effect of these upon me is not easy of description. They brought home to me the fact that I was approaching, and should presently be face to face with, the person of the woman to whom I had consecrated my love and my life and yet in that same person I should be confronting one whom I loathed and would destroy.

We were halted at last before a great door and from the number of warriors and nobles congregated before it I was confident that we were soon to be ushered into the presence of the jeddara. As we waited those assembled about us eyed us with, it seemed to me, more of hostility than curiosity and when the door swung open they accompanied us, with the exception of a few warriors, into the chamber beyond. The room was of medium size and at the farther side, behind a massive table, sat Xaxa. About her were grouped a number of heavily armed nobles and as I looked them over I wondered if among them was he for whom the body of Dar Tarus had been filched, for we had promised him that if conditions were favorable we would attempt to recover it.

Xaxa eyed us coldly as we were halted before her. "Let us see the beast perform," she commanded, and then suddenly; "What mean you by permitting strangers to enter my presence bearing arms?" she cried. "Sag Or, see that their weapons are removed!" and she turned to a handsome young warrior standing near her.

Sag Or! That was the name. Before me stood the noble for whom Dar Tarus had suffered the loss of his liberty, his body and his love. Gor Hajus had also recognized the name and Hovan Du, too; I could tell by the way they eyed the man as he advanced. Curtly he instructed us to hand our weapons to two warriors who advanced to receive them. Gor Hajus hesitated. I admit that I did not know what course to pursue. Everyone seemed hostile and yet that might be, and doubtless was, but a reflection of their attitude toward all strangers. If we refused to disarm we were but three against a room full if they chose to resort to force, or if they turned us out of the palace because of it we would be robbed of this seemingly god given opportunity to win to the very heart of Xaxa's palace and to her very presence where we must eventually win before we could strike. Would such an opportunity ever be freely offered us again? I doubted it and felt that we had better assume a vague risk now than, by refusing their demand, definitely arm their suspicions, and so I quietly removed my weapons and handed them to the warrior waiting to receive them and following my example Gor Hajus did likewise, though I can imagine with what poor grace.

Once again Xaxa signified that she would see Hovan Du perform and as Gor Hajus put him through his antics she watched listlessly, nor did anything that the ape did arouse the slightest flicker of interest among the entire group assembled about the jeddara. As the thing dragged on I became obsessed with apprehensions that all was not right. It seemed to me that an effort was being made to detain us for some purpose—to gain time. I could not understand, for instance, why Xaxa required that we repeat several times the least interesting of the ape's performances. And all the time Xaxa sat playing with a long,

slim dagger and I saw that she watched me quite as much as she watched Hovan Du, while I found it difficult to keep my eyes averted from that perfect face even though I knew that it was but a stolen mask behind which lurked the cruel mind of a tyrant and a murderess.

At last came an interruption to the performance. The door opened and a noble entered, who went directly to the jeddara whom he addressed briefly and in a low tone. I saw that she asked him several questions and that she seemed vexed by his replies. Then she dismissed him with a curt gesture and turned toward us.

"Enough of this!" she cried. Her eyes rested upon mine and she pointed her slim dagger at me. "Where is the other?" she demanded.

"What other?" I inquired.

"There were three of you, beside the ape. I know nothing about the ape, nor where nor how you acquired it; but I do know all about you, Vad Varo, and Gor Hajus, the Assassin of Toonol, and Dar Tarus. Where is Dar Tarus?" Her voice was low and musical and entirely beautiful—the voice of Valla Dia, but behind it I knew was the terrible personality of Xaxa, and I knew too that it would be hard to deceive her, for she must have received what information she had directly from Ras Thavas. It had been stupid of me not to foresee that Ras Thavas would immediately guess the purpose of my mission and warn Xaxa. I perceived instantly that it would be worse than useless to deny our identity, rather I must explain our presence—if I could.

"Where is Dar Tarus?" she repeated.

"How should I know?" I countered. "Dar Tarus has reasons to believe that he would not be safe in Phundahl and I imagine that he is not anxious that any one should know his whereabouts—myself included. He helped me to escape from the Island of Thavas, for which his liberty was to be his reward. He was not chosen to accompany me further upon my adventures."

Xaxa seemed momentarily disarmed that I did not deny my identity—evidently she had supposed that I would do so.

"You admit then," she said, "that you are Vad Varo, the assistant of Ras Thavas?"

"Have I ever sought to deny it?"

"You have disguised yourself as a red man of Barsoom."

"How could I travel in Barsoom otherwise, where every man's hand is against a stranger?"

"And why would you travel in Barsoom?" Her eyes narrowed as she waited for my reply.

"As Ras Thavas has doubtless sent you word, I am from another world and I would see more of this one," I told her. "Is that strange?"

"And you come to Phundahl and seek to gain entrance to my presence and bring with you the notorious Assassin of Toonol that you may see more of Barsoom?"

"Gor Hajus may not return to Toonol," I explained, "and so he must seek service for his sword at some other court than that of Vobis Kan—in Phundahl perhaps, or if not here he must move on. I hope that he will decide to accompany me as I am a stranger in Barsoom, unaccustomed to the manners and ways of her people. I would fare ill without a guide and mentor."

"You shall fare ill," she cried. "You have seen all of Barsoom that you are destined to see—you have reached the end of your adventure. You think to deceive me, eh? You do not know, perhaps, that I have heard of your infatuation for Valla Dia or that I am fully conversant with the purpose of your visit to Phundahl." Her eyes left me and swept her nobles and her warriors. "To the pits with them!" she cried. "Later we shall choose the manner of their passing."

Instantly we were surrounded by a score of naked blades. There was no escape for Gor Hajus or me, but I thought that I saw an opportunity for Hovan Du to get away. I had had the possibility of such a contingency in mind from the first and always I had been on the look out for an avenue of escape for one of us, and so the open windows at the right of the jeddara had not gone unnoticed, nor the great trees growing in the courtyard beneath. Hovan Du was close beside me as Xaxa spoke.

"Go!" I whispered. "The windows are open. Go, and tell Dar Tarus what has happened to us," and then I fell back away from him and dragged Gor Hajus with me as though we would attempt to resist arrest, and while I thus distracted their attention from him Hovan Du turned toward an open window. He had taken but a few steps when a warrior attempted to halt him and with that the ferocious brain of the anthropoid seemed to seize dominion over the great creature. With a hideous growl he leaped with the agility of a cat upon the unfortunate Phundahlian, swung him high in giant hands and using his body as a flail tumbled his fellows to right and left as he cut a swath toward the open window nearest him.

Instantly pandemonium reigned in the apartment. The attention of all seemed centered upon the great ape and even those who had been confronting us turned to attack Hovan Du. And in the midst of the confusion I saw Xaxa step to some heavy hangings directly behind her desk, part them and disappear.

"Come!" I whispered to Gor Hajus and apparently intent only upon watching the conflict between the ape and the warriors I moved forward with the fighters but always to the left toward the desk that Xaxa had just quitted. Hovan Du was giving a good account of himself. He had discarded his first victim and one by one had seized others as they came within range of his long arms and powerful hands, sometimes four at a time as he stood well braced upon two of his hand-like feet and fought with the other two. His shock of bristling hair stood erect upon his skull and his fierce eyes blazed with rage as, towering high above his antagonists, he fought for his life—the most feared of all the savage creatures of Barsoom. Perhaps his greatest advantage lay in the inherent fear of him that was a part of every man in that room who faced him, and it forwarded my quickly conceived plan, too, for it kept every eye turned upon Hovan Du, so that Gor Hajus and I were able to work our way to the rear of the desk. I think Hovan Du must have sensed my intention then, for he did the one thing best suited to attract every eye from us to him and, too, he gave me notice that the human half of his brain was still alert and watchful of our welfare.

Heretofore the Phundahlians must have looked upon him as a remarkable specimen of great ape, marvellously trained, but now, of a sudden, he paralyzed them with awe, for his roars and growls took the form of words and he spoke with the tongue of a human. He was near the window now. Several of the nobles were pushing bravely forward. Among them was Sag Or. Hovan Du reached forth and seized him, wrenching his weapons from him. "I go," he cried, "but let harm befall my friends and I shall return and tear the heart from Xaxa. Tell her that, from The Great Ape of Ptarth." For an instant the warriors and the nobles stood transfixed with awe. Every eye was upon Hovan Du as he stood there with the struggling figure of Sag Or in his mighty grasp. Gor Hajus and I were forgotten. And then Hovan Du turned and leaped to the sill of the window and from there lightly to the branches of the nearest tree and with him went Sag Or, the favorite of Xaxa, the jeddara; and at the same instant I drew Gor Hajus with me between the hangings in the

rear of Xaxa's desk and as they fell behind us we found ourselves in the narrow mouth of a dark corridor.

Without knowledge of where the passage led we could only follow it blindly, urged on by the necessity for discovering a hiding place or an avenue of escape from the palace before the pursuit which we knew would be immediately instituted, overtook us. As our eyes became accustomed to the gloom, which was partially dispelled by a faint luminosity, we moved more rapidly and presently came to a narrow spiral runway which descended into a dark hole below the level of the corridor and also arose into equal darkness above.

"Which way?" I asked Gor Hajus.

"They will expect us to descend," he replied, "for in that direction lies the nearest avenue of escape."

"Then we will go up."

"Good!" he exclaimed. "All we seek now is a place to hide until night has fallen, for we may not escape by day."

We had scarcely started to ascend before we heard the first sounds of pursuit—the clank of accouterments in the corridor beneath. Yet, even with this urge from behind, we were forced to move with great caution, for we knew not what lay before. At the next level there was a doorway, the door closed and locked, but there was no corridor, nor anywhere to hide, and so we continued on upward. The second level was identical with that just beneath, but at the third a single corridor ran straight off into darkness and at our right was a door, ajar. The sounds of pursuit were appreciably nearer now and the necessity for concealment seemed to grow increasingly greater until every other consideration was overwhelmed by it. Nor is this so strange when the purpose of my adventure is considered and you realize that our discovery now must assuredly spell defeat and blast forever the slender ray of hope that remained for the resurrection of Valla Dia in her own flesh.

There was scarce a moment for consideration. The corridor before us was shrouded in darkness—it might be naught but a blind alley. The door was close and ajar. I pushed it gently inward. An odor of heavy incense greeted our nostrils and through the small aperture we saw a portion of a large chamber garishly decorated. Directly before us, and almost wholly obstructing view of the entire chamber, stood a colossal statue of a squatting man-like figure. Behind us we heard voices—our pursuers already were ascending the spiral—they would be upon us in a few seconds. I examined the door and discovered that it fastened with a spring lock. I looked again into the chamber and saw no one within the range of our vision and then I motioned Gor Hajus to follow me and stepping into the room closed the door behind us. We had burned our bridges. As the door closed the lock engaged with a sharp, metallic click.

"What was that?" demanded a voice, originating, seemingly, at the far end of the chamber.

Gor Hajus looked at me and shrugged his shoulders in resignation; (he must have been thinking what I was thinking—that with two avenues we had chosen the wrong one) but he smiled and there was no reproach in his eyes.

"It sounded from the direction of the Great Tur," replied a second voice.

"Perhaps someone is at the door," suggested the first speaker.

Gor Hajus and I were flattened against the back of the statue that we might postpone as long as possible our inevitable discovery should the speakers decide to investigate the origin of the noise that had attracted their suspicions. I was facing against the polished stone of the figure's back, my hands outspread upon it. Beneath my fingers were the carved bits of its ornamental harness—



"I go," he cried, "but let harm befall my friends and I shall return and tear the heart from Xaxa. Tell her that from the Great Ape of Ptarth." ...Every eye was upon Hovan Du as he stood there with the struggling figure of Sag Or in his mighty grasp.

jutting protuberances that were costly gems were set in these trappings of stone and there were gorgeous inlays of gold filagree; but these things I had no eyes for now. We could hear the two conversing as they came nearer. Perhaps I was nervous. I do not know. I am sure I never

shrank from an encounter when either duty or expediency called; but in this instance both demanded that we avoid conflict and remain undiscovered. However that may be, my fingers must have been moving nervously over the jeweled harness of the figure when I became vaguely, per-

haps subconsciously, aware that one of the gems was loose in its setting. I do not recall that this made any impression upon my conscious mind, but I do know that it seemed to catch the attention of my wandering fingers and they must have paused to play with the loosened stone.

The voices seemed quite close now—it could be but a matter of seconds before we should be confronted by their owners. My muscles seemed to tense for the anticipated encounter and unconsciously I pressed heavily upon the loosened setting—whereat a portion of the figure's back gave noiselessly inward revealing to us the dimly lighted interior of the statue. We needed no further invitation—simultaneously we stepped across the threshold and in almost the same movement I turned and closed the panel gently behind us. I think that there was absolutely no sound connected with the entire transaction, and following it we remained in utter silence, motionless—scarce breathing. Our eyes became quickly accustomed to the dim interior which we discovered was lighted through numerous small orifices in the shell of the statue, which was entirely hollow, and through these same orifices every outside sound came clearly to our ears.

We had scarcely closed the opening when we heard the voices directly outside it and simultaneously there came a hammering on the door by which we had entered the apartment from the corridor. "Who seeks entrance to Xaxa's Temple?" demanded one of the voices within the room.

"'Tis I, dwar of the Jeddara's Guard," boomed a voice from without. "We are seeking two who came to assassinate Xaxa."

"Came they this way?"

"Think you, priest, that I should be seeking them here had they not?"

"How long since?"

"Scarce twenty tals* since," replied the dwar.

"Then they are not here," the priest assured him, "for we have been here for a full zode* and no other has entered the temple during that time. Look quickly to Xaxa's apartment above and to the roof and the hangars, for if you followed them up the spiral there is no other place where they might flee."

"Watch then the temple carefully until I return," shouted the warrior and we heard him and his men moving on up the spiral.

Now we heard the priests conversing as they moved slowly past the statue.

"What could have caused the noise that first attracted our attention?" asked one.

"Perhaps the fugitive tried the door," suggested the other.

"It must have been that, but they did not enter or we should have seen them when they emerged from behind the Great Tur, for we were facing him at the time, nor have we once turned our eyes from this end of the temple since."

"Then at least they are not within the temple."

"And where else they may be is no concern of ours."

"No, nor if they reached Xaxa's apartment, if they did not pass through the temple."

"Perhaps they did reach it."

"And they were assassins!"

"Worse things might befall Phundahl."

"Hush! the gods have ears."

"Of stone."

"But the ears of Xaxa are not of stone and they hear many things that are not intended for them."

"The old she-banth!"

"She is Jeddara and High Priestess."

"Yes, but—" the voices passed beyond the range of our ears at the far end of the temple, yet they had told me much—that Xaxa was feared and hated by the priesthood and that the priests themselves had none too much reverence for their deity, as evidenced by the remark of one that the gods have ears of stone. And they had told us other things, important things, when they conversed with the dwar of the Jeddara's Guard.

Gor Hajus and I now felt that we had fallen by chance upon a most ideal place of concealment, for the very guardians of the temple would swear that we were not, could not be, where we were. Already had they thrown the pursuers off our track.

NOW, for the first time, we had an opportunity to examine our hiding place. The interior of the statue was hollow and far above us, perhaps forty feet, we could see the outside light shining through the mouth, ears and nostrils, just below which a circular platform could be discerned running around the inside of the neck. A ladder with flat rungs led upward from the base to the platform. Thick dust covered the floor on which we stood and the extremity of our opposition suggested a careful examination of this dust with the result that I was at once impressed by the evidence that it revealed, which indicated that we were the first to enter the statue for a long time, possibly for years, as the fine coating of almost impalpable dust that covered the floor was undisturbed. As I searched for this evidence my eyes fell upon something lying huddled close to the base of the ladder and approaching nearer I saw that it was a human skeleton, while a closer examination revealed that the skull was crushed and one arm and several ribs broken. About it lay, dust covered, the most gorgeous trappings I had ever seen. Its position at the foot of the ladder as well as the crushed skull and broken bones appeared quite conclusive evidence of the manner in which death had come—the man had fallen head foremost from the circular platform forty feet above, carrying with him to eternity, doubtless, the secret of the entrance to the interior of the Great Tur.

I suggested this to Gor Hajus who was examining the dead man's trappings and he agreed with me that such must have been the manner of his death.

"He was a high priest of Tur," whispered Gor Hajus, "and probably a member of the royal house—possibly a jeddak. He has been dead a long time."

"I am going up above," I said. "I will test the ladder. If it is safe, follow me up. I think we shall be able to see the interior of the temple through the mouth of Tur."

"Go carefully," Gor Hajus admonished; "the ladder is very old."

I went carefully, testing each rung before I trusted my weight to it, but I found the old sorapus wood of which it was constructed sound and as stanch as steel. How the high priest came to his death must always remain a mystery, for the ladder or the circular platform would have carried the weight of a hundred men.

From the platform I could see through the mouth of Tur. Below me was a large chamber along the sides of which were ranged other, though lesser idols. They were even more grotesque than those I had seen in the temple in the city and their trappings were rich beyond the conception of man—Earth man—for the gems of Barsoom scintillate with rays unknown to us and of such gorgeous and blinding beauty as to transcend description. Directly in front of the Great Tur was an altar of palthon, a rare and beautiful stone, blood red, in which are traced in purest white Nature's most fanciful designs, the whole vastly enhanced by the wondrous polish which the stone takes beneath the hand of the craftsman.

* A tal is about one second and a zode approximately two and one half hours earth time.

Gor Hajus joined me and together we examined the interior of the temple. Tall windows lined two sides, letting in a flood of light. At the far end, opposite the Great Tur, were two enormous doors, closing the main entrance to the chamber, and here stood the two priests whom we had heard conversing. Otherwise the temple was deserted. Incense burned upon tiny altars before each of the minor idols, but whether any burned before the Great Tur we could not see.

Having satisfied our curiosity relative to the temple we returned our attention to a further examination of the interior of Tur's huge head and were rewarded by the discovery of another ladder leading upward against the rear wall to a higher and smaller platform that evidently led to the eyes. It did not take me long to investigate and here I found a most comfortable chair set before a control that operated the eyes, so that they could be made to turn from side to side, or up or down, or to roll, according to the whim of the operator; and here too was a speaking tube leading to the mouth. This again I must needs investigate and so I returned to the lower platform and there I discovered a device beneath the tongue of the idol, and this device, which was in the nature of an amplifier, was connected with the speaking tube from above. I could not repress a smile as I considered these silent witnesses to the perfidy of man and thought of the broken thing lying at the foot of the ladder. Tur, I could have sworn, had been silent for many years.

Together Gor Hajus and I returned to the higher platform and again I made a discovery—the eyes of Tur were veritable periscopes. By turning them we could see any portion of the temple and what we saw through the eyes was magnified. Nothing could escape the eyes of Tur and presently, when the priests began to talk again, we discovered that nothing could escape Tur's ears, for every slightest sound in the temple came clearly to us. What a valuable adjunct to high priesthood this Great Tur must have been in the days when that broken skeleton lying below was a thing of blood and life!

XII.

The Great Tur

THE day dragged wearily for Gor Hajus and me. We watched the various priests who came in pairs at intervals to relieve those who had preceded them, and we listened to their prattle, mostly idle gossip of court scandals. At times they spoke of us and we learned that Hovan Du had escaped with Sag Or, nor had they been located as yet, nor had Dar Tarus. The whole court was mystified by our seemingly miraculous disappearance. Three thousand people, the inmates and attaches of the palace, were constantly upon the lookout for us. Every part of the palace and the palace grounds had been searched and searched again. The pits had been explored more thoroughly than they had been explored within the memory of the oldest retainer, and it seemed that queer things had been unearthed there—things of which not even Xaxa dreamed; and the priests whispered that at least one great and powerful house would fall because of what a dwar of the Jed-dara's Guard had discovered in a remote precinct of the pits.

As the sun dropped below the horizon and darkness came the interior of the temple was brilliantly illuminated by a soft white light but without the glare of earthly artificial illumination. More priests came and many young girls, priestesses. They performed before the idols, chanting meaningless gibberish. Gradually the chamber filled with worshippers, nobles of the jeddara's court with

their women and their retainers, forming in two lines along either side of the temple before the lesser idols, leaving a wide aisle from the great entrance to the foot of the Great Tur and toward this aisle they all faced, waiting. For what were they waiting? Their eyes were turned expectantly toward the closed doors of the great entrance and Gor Hajus and I felt our eyes held there too, fascinated by the suggestion that they were about to open and reveal some stupendous spectacle.

And presently they did swing slowly open and all we saw was what appeared to be a great roll of carpet lying upon its side across the opening. Twenty slaves, naked but for their scant leathern harness, stood behind the huge roll and as the doors swung fully open they rolled the carpet inward to the very foot of the altar before the Great Tur, covering the wide aisle from the entranceway almost to the idol with a thick, soft rug of gold and white and blue. It was the most beautiful thing in the temple where all else was blatant, loud and garish, or hideous, or grotesque. And then the doors closed and again we waited; but not for long. Bugles sounded from without, the sound increasing as they neared the entrance. Once more the doors swung in. Across the entrance stood a double rank of gorgeously trapped nobles. Slowly they entered the temple and behind them came a splendid chariot drawn by two banths, the fierce Barsoomian lion, held in leash by slaves on either side. Upon the chariot was a litter and in the litter, reclining at ease, lay Xaxa. As she entered the temple the people commenced to chant her praises in a monotonous sing-song. Chained to the chariot and following on foot was a red warrior and behind him a procession composed of fifty young men and an equal number of young girls.

Gor Hajus touched my arm. "The prisoner," he whispered; "do you recognize him?"

"Dar Tarus!" I exclaimed.

It was Dar Tarus—they had discovered his hiding place and arrested him, but what of Hovan Du? Had they taken him, also? If they had it must have been only after slaying him, for they never would have sought to capture the fierce beast, nor would he have brooked capture. I looked for Sag Or, but he was nowhere to be seen within the temple and this fact gave me hope that Hovan Du might be still at liberty.

The chariot was halted before the altar and Xaxa alighted, the lock that held Dar Tarus chained to the vehicle was opened and the banths were led away by their attendants to one side of the temple behind the lesser idols. Then Dar Tarus was dragged roughly to the altar and thrown upon it and Xaxa, mounting the steps at its base, came close to his side and with hands outstretched above him looked up at the Great Tur towering above her. How beautiful she was! How richly trapped! Ah, Valla Dia! that your sweet form should be debased to the cruel purposes of the wicked mind that now animates you!

Xaxa's eyes now rested upon the face of the Great Tur. "O, Tur, Father of Barsoom," she cried, "behold the offering we place before you, All-seeing, All-knowing, All-powered One, and frown no more upon us in silence. For a hundred years you have not deigned to speak aloud to your faithful slaves; never since Hora San, the high priest, was taken away by you on that long gone night of mystery have you unsealed your lips to your people. Speak, Great Tur! Give us some sign, ere we plunge this dagger into the heart of our offering, that our works are pleasing in thine eyes. Tell us whither went the two who came here today to assassinate your high priestess; reveal to us the fate of Sag Or. Speak, Great Tur, ere I strike." And she raised her slim blade above the heart of Dar Tarus and looked straight upward into the eyes of Tur.

And then, as a bolt from the blue, I was struck by the great inspiration. My hand sought the lever controlling the eyes of Tur and I turned them until they completed a full circuit of the room and rested again upon Xaxa. The effect was magical. Never before had I seen a whole room full of people so absolutely stunned and awe-struck as were these. As the eyes returned to Xaxa she seemed turned to stone and her copper skin to have taken on an ashen purple hue. Her dagger remained stiffly poised above the heart of Dar Tarus. Not for a hundred years had they seen the eyes of the Great Tur move, and then I placed the speaking tube to my lips and the voice of Tur rumbled through the chamber. As from one great throat a gasp arose from the crowded temple floor and the people fell upon their knees and buried their faces in their hands.

"Judgment is mine!" I cried. "Strike not lest ye be struck! To Tur is the sacrifice!"

I was silent then, attempting to plan how best to utilize the advantage I had gained. Fearfully, one by one, the bowed heads were raised and frightened eyes sought the face of Tur. I gave them another thrill by letting the god's eyes wander slowly over the upturned faces and while I was doing this I had another inspiration, which I imparted to Gor Hajus in a low whisper. I could hear him chuckle as he started down the ladder to carry my new plan into effect. Again I had recourse to the speaking tube.

"The sacrifice is Tur's," I rumbled. "Tur will strike with his own hand. Extinguish the lights and let no one move under pain of instant death until Tur gives the word. Prostrate yourselves and bury your eyes in your palms, for whosoever sees shall be blinded when the spirit of Tur walks among his people."

Down they went again and one of the priests hurriedly extinguished the lights, leaving the temple in total darkness and while Gor Hajus was engaged with his part of the performance I tried to cover any accidental noise he might make by keeping up a running fire of celestial revelation.

"Xaxa, the high priestess, asks what has become of the two whom she believed came to assassinate her. I, Tur, took them to myself. Vengeance is Tur's! And Sag Or I took, also. In the guise of a great ape I came and took Sag Or and none knew me, though even a fool might have guessed, for who is there ever heard a great ape speak with tongue of man unless he was animated by the spirit of Tur?"

I guess that convinced them, it being just the sort of logic suited to their religion, or it would have convinced them if they had not already been convinced. I wondered what might be passing in the mind of the doubting priest who had remarked that the gods had ears of stone.

Presently I heard a noise upon the ladder beneath me and a moment later someone climbed upon the circular landing.

"All's well," whispered the voice of Gor Hajus. "Dar Tarus is with me."

"Light the temple!" I commanded through the speaking tube. "Rise and look upon your altar."

The lights flashed on and the people rose, trembling, to their feet. Every eye was bent upon the altar and what they saw there just seemed to crush them with terror. Some of the women screamed and fainted. It all impressed me with the belief that none of them had taken this god of theirs with any great amount of seriousness and now when they were confronted with absolute proof of his miraculous powers they were swept completely off their feet. Where, a few moments before, they had seen a live sacrifice awaiting the knife of the high priestess they saw now only a dust covered human skull. I grant you that without an explanation it might have seemed

a miracle to almost any one so quickly had Gor Hajus run from the base of the idol with the skull of the dead high priest and returned again leading Dar Tarus with him. I had been a bit concerned as to what the attitude of Dar Tarus might be, who was no more conversant with the hoax than were the Phundahlans, but Gor Hajus had whispered "For Valla Dia" in his ear and he had understood and come quickly.

"The Great Tur," I now announced, "is angry with his people. For a long time they have denied him in their hearts even while they made open worship of him. The Great Tur is angry with Xaxa. Only through Xaxa may the people of Phundahl be saved from destruction, for the Great Tur is angry. Go then from the temple and the palace leaving no human being here other than Xaxa, the high priestess of Tur. Leave her here in solitude beside the altar. Tur would speak with her alone."

I could see Xaxa fairly shrivel with fright.

"Is the Jeddara Xaxa, High Priestess of the Great God Tur, afraid to meet her master?" I demanded. The woman's jaw trembled so that she could not reply. "Ohey! or Xaxa and all her people shall be struck dead!" I fairly screamed at them.

Like cattle they turned and fled toward the entrance and Xaxa, her knees shaking so that she could scarce stand erect, staggered after them. A noble saw her and pushed her roughly back, but she shrieked and ran after him when he had left her. Then others dragged her to the foot of the altar and threw her roughly down and one menaced her with his sword, but at that I called aloud that no harm must befall the jeddara if they did not wish the wrath of Tur to fall upon them all. They left her lying there and so weak from fright was she that she could not rise. A moment later the temple was empty, but not until I had shouted after them to clear the whole palace within a quarter zode, for my plan required a free and unobstructed as well as unobserved field of action.

The last of them was scarce out of sight ere we three descended from the head of Tur and stepped out upon the temple floor behind the idol. Quickly I ran toward the altar, upon the other side of which Xaxa had dropped to the floor in a swoon. She still lay there and I gathered her into my arms and ran quickly back to the door in the wall behind the idol—the doorway through which Gor Hajus and I had entered the temple earlier in the day.

Preceded by Gor Hajus and followed by Dar Tarus I ascended the runway toward the roof where the conversation of the priests had informed us were located the royal hangars. Had Hovan Du and Sag Or been with us my cup of happiness would have been full, for within half a day what had seemed utter failure and defeat had been turned almost to assured success. At the landing where lay Xaxa's apartments we halted and looked within, for the long night voyage I contemplated would be cold and the body of Valla Dia must be kept warm with suitable robes even though it was inhabited by the spirit of Xaxa. Seeing no one we entered and soon found what we required. As I was adjusting a heavy robe of orluk about the jeddara she regained consciousness. Instantly she recognized me and then Gor Hajus and finally Dar Tarus. Mechanically she felt for her dagger, but it was not there and when she saw my smile she paled with anger. At first she must have jumped to the conclusion that she had been the victim of a hoax, but presently a doubt seemed to enter her mind—she must have been recalling some of the things that had transpired within the temple of the Great Tur, and these, neither she nor any other mortal might explain.

"Who are you?" she demanded.

"I am Tur," I replied, brazenly.

"What is your purpose with me?"

"I am going to take you away from Phundahl," I replied.

"But I do not wish to go. You are not Tur. You are Vad Varo. I shall call for help and my guards will come and slay you."

"There is no one in the palace," I reminded her; "did I, Tur, not send them away?"

"I shall not go with you," she announced firmly. "Rather would I die."

"You shall go with me, Xaxa," I replied, and though she fought and struggled we carried her from her apartment and up the spiral runway to the roof where, I prayed, I should find the hangars and the royal fliers, and as we stepped out in the fresh night air of Mars we did see the hangars before us, but we saw something else—a group of Phundahlilans, warriors of the Jeddara's Guard, whom they had evidently failed to notify of the commands of Tur. At sight of them Xaxa cried aloud in relief.

"To me! To the Jeddara!" she cried. "Strike down these assassins and save me!"

There were three of them and there were three of us, but they were armed and between us we had but Xaxa's slender dagger. Gor Hajus carried that. Victory seemed turned to defeat as they rushed toward us; but it was Gor Hajus who gave them pause. He seized Xaxa and raised the blade, its point above her heart. "Halt!" he cried, "or I strike."

The warriors hesitated; Xaxa was silent, stricken with fear. Thus we stood in stalemate when, just beyond the three Phundahlilans, I saw a movement at the roof's edge. What was it? In the dim light I saw something that seemed a human head, and yet unhuman, rise slowly above the edge of the roof, and then, silently, a great form followed, and then I recognized it—Hovan Du, the great white ape.

"Tell them," I cried to Xaxa in a loud voice that Hovan Du might hear, "that I am Tur, for see, I come again in the semblance of a white ape!" and I pointed to Hovan Du. "I would not destroy these poor warriors. Let them lay down their weapons and go in peace."

The men turned, and seeing the great ape standing there behind them, materialized, it might have been, out of thin air, were shaken.

"Who is he, Jeddara?" demanded one of the men.

"It is Tur," replied Xaxa in a weak voice; "but save me from him!" Save me from him!"

"Throw down your weapons and your harness and fly!" I commanded, "or Tur will strike you dead. Heard you not the people rushing from the palace at Tur's command? How think you we brought Xaxa hither with a lesser power than Tur's when all her palace was filled with her fighting men? Go, while yet you may in safety."

One of them unbuckled his harness and threw it with his weapons upon the roof and as he started at a run for the spiral his companions followed his example. Then Hovan Du approached us.

"Well done, Vad Varo," he growled, "though I know not what it is all about."

"That you shall know later," I told him; "but now we must find a swift flier and be upon our way. Where is Sag Or? Does he still live?"

"I have him securely bound and safely hidden in one of the high towers of the palace," replied the ape. "It will be easy to get him when we have launched a flier."

Xaxa was eyeing us ragefully. "You are no Tur!" she cried. "The ape has exposed you."

"But too late to profit you in any way, jeddara," I assured her; "nor could you convince one of your people who stood in the temple this night that I am not Tur. Nor do you, yourself, know that I am not. The ways of

Tur, the all-powerful, all-knowing, are beyond the conception of mortal man. To you, then, jeddara, I am Tur, and you will find me all-powerful enough for my purposes."

I think she was still perplexed as we found and dragged forth a flier, aboard which we placed her, and turned the craft's nose toward a lofty tower where Hovan Du told us lay Sag Or.

"I shall be glad to see myself again," said Dar Tarus, with a laugh.

"And you shall be yourself again, Dar Tarus," I told him, "as soon as ever we can come again to the pits of Ras Thavas."

"Would that I might be reunited with my sweet Kara Vasa," he sighed. "Then, Vad Varo, the last full measure of my gratitude would be yours."

"Where may we find her?"

"Alas, I do not know. It was while I was searching for her that I was apprehended by the agents of Xaxa. I had been to her father's palace only to learn that he had been assassinated and his property confiscated. The whereabouts of Kara Vasa they either did not know or would not divulge; but they held me there upon one pretext or another until a detachment of the Jeddara's Guard could come and arrest me."

"We shall have to make inquiries of Sag Or," I said.

We were now coming to a stop alongside a window of the tower Hovan Du had indicated, and he and Dar Tarus leaped to the sill and disappeared within. We were all armed now, having taken the weapons discarded by the three warriors at the hangars, and with a good flier beneath our feet and all our little company reunited, with Xaxa and Sag Or, whom they were now conducting aboard, we were indeed in high spirits.

As we got under way again, setting our nose toward the east, I asked Sag Or if he knew what had become of Kara Vasa, but he assured me, in surly tones, that he did not.

"Think again, Sag Or," I admonished him, "and think hard, for perhaps upon your answer your life depends."

"What chance have I for life?" he sneered, casting an ugly look toward Dar Tarus.

"You have every chance," I replied. "Your life lies in the hollow of my hand; if you serve me well it shall be yours, though in your own body and not in that belonging to Dar Tarus."

"You do not intend destroying me?"

"Neither you nor Xaxa," I answered. "Xaxa shall live on in her own body and you in yours."

"I do not wish to live in my own body," snapped jeddara.

Dar Tarus stood looking at Sag Or—looking at his own body like some disembodied soul—as weird a situation as I have ever encountered.

"Tell me, Sag Or," he said, "what has become of Kara Vasa? When my body has been restored to me and yours to you I shall hold no enmity against you if you have not harmed Kara Vasa and will tell me where she be."

"I cannot tell you, for I do not know. She was not harmed, but the day after you were assassinated she disappeared from Phundahl. We were positive that she was spirited away by her father, but from him we could learn nothing. Then he was assassinated," the man glanced at Xaxa, "and since, we have learned nothing. A slave told us that Kara Vasa, with some of her father's warriors, had embarked upon a flier and set out for Helium, where she purposed placing herself under the protection of the great War Lord of Barsoom; but of the truth of that we know nothing. This is the truth. I, Sag Or, have spoken!"

It was futile then to search Phundahl for Kara Vasa and so we held our course toward the east and the Tower of Thavas.

CHAPTER XIII

Back to Thavas

ALL that night we sped beneath the hurtling moons of Mars, as strange a company as was ever foregathered upon any planet, I will swear. Two men, each possessing the body of the other, an old and wicked empress whose fair body belonged to a youthful damsel beloved by another of this company, a great white ape dominated by half the brain of a human being, and I, a creature of a distant planet, with Gor Hajus, the Assassin of Toonol, completed the mad roster.

I could scarcely keep my eyes from the fair form and face of Xaxa, and it is well that I was thus fascinated for I caught her in the act of attempting to hurl herself overboard, so repugnant to her was the prospect of living again in her own old and hideous corpse. After that I kept her securely bound and fastened to the deck, though it hurt me to see the bonds upon those fair limbs.

Dar Tarus was almost equally fascinated by contemplation of his own body, which he had not seen for many years.

"By my first ancestor," he ejaculated. "It must be that I was the least vain of fellows, for I give you my word I had no idea that I was so fair to look upon, and I can say this now without seeming egotism, since I am speaking of Sag Or," and he laughed aloud at his little joke.

But the fact remained that the body and face of Dar Tarus were beautiful indeed, though there was a hint of steel in the eyes and the set of the jaw betokened fighting blood. Little wonder, then, that Sag Or had coveted the body of this young warrior, for his own, which Dar Tarus now possessed, was marked by dissipation and age; or that Dar Tarus yearned to come again into his own.

Just before dawn we dropped to one of the numerous small islands that dot the great Toonolian Marshes and nosing the ship between the boles of great trees we came to rest upon the surface of the ground, half buried in the lush and gorgeous jungle grasses, well hidden from the sight of possible pursuers. Here Hovan Du found fruits and nuts for us which the simian section of his brain pronounced safe for human consumption and instinct led him to a nearby spring from which there bubbled delicious water. We four were half famished and much fatigued, so that the food and water were most welcome to us, nor did Xaxa and Sag Or refuse them. Having eaten, the three of us lay down upon the ship's deck to sleep, after securely chaining our prisoners, while the fourth stood watch. In this way, taking turns, we slept away most of the day and when night fell, rested and refreshed, we were ready to resume our flight.

Making a wide detour to the south we avoided Toonol and about two hours before dawn we sighted the high Tower of Tavas. I think we were all keyed up to the highest pitch of excitement, for there was not one aboard that flier whose whole life would not be seriously affected by the success or failure of our venture. As a first precaution we secured the hands of Xaxa and Sag Or behind their backs and placed gags in their mouths, lest they succeed in giving warning of our approach.

Cluros had long since set and Thuria was streaming toward the horizon as we stopped our motor and drifted without lights a mile or two south of the tower while we waited impatiently for Thuria to leave the heavens to darkness and the world to us. To the northwest the lights of Toonol shone brightly against the background of the sky and there were lights too in some of the windows of the great laboratory of Ras Thavas, but the tower itself was dark from plinth to pinnacle.

And now the nearer moon dropped plummet-like beneath the horizon and left the scene to darkness and to us. Dar Tarus started the motor, the wonderful, silent motor of Barsoom, and we moved slowly, close to the ground, toward Ras Thavas' island, with no sound other than the gentle whirring of our propeller, nor could that have been heard a hundred feet away, so slowly was it turning. Close off the island we came to a stop behind a cluster of giant trees and Hovan Du, going into the bow, uttered a few low growls. Then we stood waiting in silence, listening. There was a rustling in the dense undergrowth upon the shore. Again Hovan Du voiced his low, grim call and this time there came an answer from the black shadows. Hovan Du spoke in the language of the great apes and the invisible creature replied.

For five minutes, during which time we were aware from the different voices that others had joined in the conversation from the shore, the apes conversed, and then Hovan Du turned to me.

"It is arranged," he said. "They will permit us to hide our ship beneath these trees and they will permit us to pass out again when we are ready and board her, nor will they harm us in any way. All they ask is that when we are through we shall leave the gate open that leads to the inner court."

"Do they understand that while an ape goes in with us none will return with us?" I asked.

"Yes; but they will not harm us."

"Why do they wish the gate left open?"

"Do not inquire too closely, Vad Varo," replied Hovan Du. "It should be enough that the great apes make it possible for you to restore Valla Dia's body to her brain and escape with her from this terrible place."

"It is enough," I replied. "When may we land?"

"At once. They will help us drag the ship beneath the trees and make her fast."

"But first we must top the wall to the inner court," I reminded him.

"Yes, true—I had forgotten that we cannot open the gate from this side."

He spoke again, then, to the apes, whom we had not yet seen, and then he told me that all was arranged and that he and Dar Tarus would return with the ship after landing us inside the wall.

Again we got under way and rising slowly above the outer wall dropped silently to the courtyard beyond. The night was unusually dark, clouds having followed Thuria and blotted out the stars after the moon had set. No one could have seen the ship at a distance of fifty feet and we moved almost without noise. Quietly we lowered our prisoners over the side and Gor Hajus and I remained with them while Dar Tarus and Hovan Du rose again and piloted the ship back to its hiding place beneath the trees.

I moved at once to the gate and, unlatching it, waited. I heard nothing. Never, I think, have I endured such utter silence. There came no sound from the great pile rising behind me, nor any from the dark jungle beyond the wall. Dimly I could see the huddled forms of Gor Hajus, Xaxa and Sag Or beside me—otherwise I might have been alone in the darkness and immensity of space.

It seemed an eternity that I waited there before I heard a soft scratching on the panels of the heavy gate. I pushed it open and Dar Tarus and Hovan Du stepped silently within as I closed and relatched it. No one spoke. All had been carefully planned so that there was no need of speech. Dar Tarus and I led the way, Gor Hajus and Hovan Du brought up the rear with the prisoners. We moved directly to the entrance to the tower, found the runway and descended to the pits. Every fortune seemed with us. We met no one, we had no difficulty in finding the vault we sought and once within we secured the door

so that we had no fear of interruption—that was our first concern—and then I hastened to the spot where I had hidden Valla Dia behind the body of a large warrior, tucked far back against the wall in a dark corner. My heart stood still as I dragged aside the body of the warrior, for always had I feared that Ras Thavas, knowing my interest in her and guessing the purpose of my venture, would cause every chamber and pit to be searched and every body to be examined until he found her for whom he sought, but my fears had been baseless, for there lay the body of Xaxa, the old and wrinkled casket of the lovely brain of my beloved, where I had hidden it against this very night. Gently I lifted it out and bore it to one of the two ersite topped tables. Xaxa, standing there bound and gagged, looked on with eyes that shot hate and loathing at me and at that hideous body to which her brain was so soon to be restored.

As I lifted her to the adjoining slabs she tried to wriggle from my grasp and hurl herself to the floor, but I held her and soon had strapped her securely in place. A moment later she was unconscious and the re-transference was well under way. Gor Hajus, Sag Or and Hovan Du were interested spectators, but to Dar Tarus, who stood ready to assist me, it was an old story, for he had worked in the laboratory and seen more than enough of similar operations. I will not bore you with a description of it—it was but a repetition of what I had done many times in preparation of this very event.

At last it was completed and my heart fairly stood still as I replaced the embalming fluid with Valla Dia's own life blood and saw the color mount to her cheek and her rounded bosoms rise and fall to her gentle breathing. Then she opened her eyes and looked up into mine.

"What has happened, Vad Varo?" she asked. "Has something gone amiss that you have recalled me so soon, or did I not respond to the fluid?"

Her eyes wandered past me to the faces of the others standing about. "What does it mean?" she asked. "Who are these?"

I raised her gently in my arms and pointed at the body of Xaxa lying death-like on the ersite slab beside her. Valla Dia's eyes went wide. "It is done?" she cried, and clapped her hands to her face and felt of all her features and of the soft delicate contours of her smooth neck, and yet she could scarcely believe it and asked for a glass. I took one from Xaxa's pocket pouch and handed it to her. She looked long into it and the tears commenced to roll down her cheeks and then she looked up at me through the mist of them and put her dear arms about my neck and drew my face down to hers. "My chieftain," she whispered—that was all. But it was enough. For those two words I had risked my life and faced unknown dangers and gladly would I risk my life again for that same reward and always, forever.

Another night had fallen before I had completed the restoration of Dar Tarus and Hovan Du. Xaxa and Sag Or and the great ape I left sleeping the death-like sleep of Ras Thavas' marvellous anaesthetic. The great ape I had no intention of restoring, but the others I felt bound to restore to Phundahl, though Dar Tarus, now resplendent in his own flesh and the gorgeous trappings of Sag Or, urged me not to inflict them again upon the long suffering Phundahlilans.

"But I have given my word," I told him.

"Then they must be returned," he said.

"Though what I may do afterward is another matter," I added, for a bold scheme had suddenly occurred to me.

I did not tell Dar Tarus what it was nor would I have had time, for at that very instant we heard someone without trying the door and then we heard voices and presently the door was tried again, this time with force. We made no noise, but just waited. I hoped that whoever it was

would go away. The door was very strong and when they tried to force it they must soon have realized the futility of it because they quickly desisted and we heard their voices for only a short time thereafter. They seemed to have gone away.

"We must leave," I said, "before they return."

Strapping the hands of Xaxa and Sag Or behind them and placing gags in their mouths I quickly restored them to life, nor ever did I see two less grateful. The looks they cast upon me might well have killed could looks do that and with what disgust they viewed one another was writ plain in their eyes.

Cautiously unbolting the door I opened it very quietly, a naked sword in my right hand and Dar Tarus, Gor Hajus and Hovan Du ready with theirs at my shoulder, and as it swung back it revealed two standing in the corridor watching—two of Ras Thavas' slaves and one of them was Yamdor, his body servant. At sight of us the fellow gave a loud cry of recognition and before I could leap through the doorway and prevent they had both turned and were flying up the corridor as fast as their feet would carry them.

Now there was no time to be lost—everything must be sacrificed to speed. Without thought of caution or silence we hastened through the pits toward the runway in the tower and when we stepped into the inner court it was night again, but the farther moon was in the heavens and there were no clouds. The result was that we were instantly discovered by a sentry who gave the alarm as he ran forward to intercept us.

What was a sentry doing in the courtyard of Ras Thavas? I could not understand. And what were these? A dozen armed warriors were hurrying across the court on the heels of the sentry.

"Toonolians!" shouted Gor Hajus. "The warriors of Vobis Kan, Jeddak of Toonol!"

Breathlessly we raced for the gate. If we could but reach it first! But we were handicapped by our prisoners who held back the moment they discovered how they might embarrass us, and so it was that we all met in front of the gate and Dar Tarus and Gor Hajus and Hovan Du and I put Valla Dia and our prisoners behind us and fought the twenty warriors of Toonol with the odds five to one against us; but we had more heart in the fight than they and perhaps that gave us an advantage, though I am sure that Gor Hajus was as ten men himself so terrible was the effect of his name alone upon the men of Toonol.

"Gor Hajus!" cried one, the first to recognize him.

"Yes, it is Gor Hajus," replied the Assassin; "prepare to meet your ancestors!" and he drove into them like a racing propeller and I was upon his right and Hovan Du and Dar Tarus upon his left.

It was a pretty fight, but it must eventually have gone against us, so greatly were we outnumbered had I not thought of the apes and the gate beside us. Working my way to it I threw it open and there upon the outside, attracted by the noise of the conflict, stood a full dozen of the great beasts. I called to Gor Hajus and the others to fall back beside the gate and as the apes rushed in I pointed to the Toonolian warriors.

I think the apes were at a loss to know which were friends and which were foes, but the Toonolians apprised them by attacking them, while we stood aside with our points upon the ground. Just a moment we stood thus waiting and then as the apes rushed among the Toonolian warriors we slipped into the darkness of the jungle beyond the outer wall and sought our flier. Behind us we could hear the growls and the roars of the beasts mingled with the shouts and the curses of the men and the sound still rose from the courtyard as we clambered aboard the flier and pushed off into the night.



I think the effect of the awful silence in the presence of the living god was more impressive than would words have been. The two priests simply collapsed. They slid to the floor and lay there trembling, moaning and supplicating Tur to have mercy on them. Nor did they rise before the first worshippers arrived.

AS soon as we felt that we were safely out of the Island of Thavas I removed the gags from the mouths of Xaxa and Sag Or. I immediately regret-

ted it for never in my life had I been subjected to such a horrid abuse as poured from the wrinkled old lips of the jeddara, and it was only when I started to gag her again

that she promised to desist from her volley of abuse.

My plans were now well laid and they included a return to Phundahl since I could not start for Duhor with Valla Dia without provisions and fuel, nor could I obtain these elsewhere than in Phundahl since I felt that I held the key that would unlock the resources of that city to me, whereas all Toonol was in arms against us owing to Vobis Kan's fear of Gor Hajus.

And so we retraced our way toward Phundahl, as secretly as we had come, for I had no mind to be apprehended before we had gained entrance to the palace of Xaxa.

Again we rested over daylight upon the same island that had given us sanctuary two days before and at dark we set out upon the last leg of our journey to Phundahl. If there had been pursuit we had seen naught of it and that might easily be explained by the great extent of the uninhabited marshes across which we flew and the far southerly course that we followed close above the ground.

As we neared Phundahl I caused Xaxa and Sag Or to be again gagged and further I had their heads bandaged so that none might recognize them and then we sailed straight over the city toward the palace, hoping that we would not be discovered and yet ready in the event that we should be.

But we came to the hangars on the roof apparently unseen and constantly I coached each upon the part he was to play. As we were settling slowly to the roof Dar Tarus, Hovan Du and Valla Dia quickly bound Gor Hajus and me and wrapped our heads in bandages for we had seen below the figures of the hangar guard. Had we found the roof unguarded the binding of Gor Hajus and me would have been unnecessary.

As we dropped nearer one of the guard hailed us. "What ship?" he cried.

"The royal flier of the Jeddara of Phundahl," replied Dar Tarus, "returning with Xaxa and Sag Or."

The warriors whispered among themselves as we dropped nearer and I must confess that I felt a bit nervous as to the outcome of our ruse, but they permitted us to land without a word and when they saw Valla Dia they saluted her after the manner of Barsoom, as, with the regal carriage of an empress, she descended from the deck of the flier.

"Carry the prisoners to my apartments!" she commanded, addressing the guard, and with the help of Hovan Du and Dar Tarus the four bound and muffled figures were carried from the flier down the spiral runway to the apartments of Xaxa, Jeddara of Phundahl. Here excited slaves hastened to do the bidding of the jeddara and word must have flown through the palace with the speed of light that Xaxa had returned, for almost immediately court functionaries began to arrive and be announced; but Valla Dia sent word that she would see no one for a while. Then she dismissed her slaves and at my suggestion Dar Tarus investigated the apartments with a view to finding a safe hiding place for Gor Hajus, me, and the prisoners. This he soon found in a small antechamber directly off the main apartment of the royal suite, the bonds were removed from the assassin and myself and together we carried Xaxa and Sag Or into the room. The doorway was furnished with a heavy door over which there were hangings that completely hid it. I bade Hovan Du, who, like the rest of us, wore Phundahlian harness, stand guard before the hangings and let no one enter but members of our own party and Gor Hajus and I took up our positions just within the hangings through which we cut small holes that permitted us to see all that went on within the main chamber, for I was greatly concerned for Valla Dia's safety while she posed as Xaxa, whom I knew to be both feared and hated by her people and therefore always liable to assassination.

Valla Dia summoned the slaves and bade them admit

the officials of the court and as the doors opened fully a score of nobles entered. They appeared ill at ease and I could guess that they were recalling the episode in the temple when they had deserted their jeddara and even hurled her roughly at the feet of the Great Tur, but Valla Dia soon put them at their ease.

"I have summoned you," she said, "to hear the word of Tur. Tur would speak again to his people. Three days and three nights have I spent with Tur. His anger against Phundahl is great. He bids me summon all the higher nobles to the temple after the evening meal tonight, and all the priests, and the commanders and dwarfs of the Guard, and as many of the lesser nobles as be in the palace, and then shall the people of Phundahl hear the word and the law of Tur and all those who shall obey shall live and all those who shall not obey shall die, and woe be to him who, having been summoned, shall not be in the temple this night. I, Xaxa, Jeddara of Phundahl, have spoken! Go!"

They went and they seemed glad to go, and then Valla Dia summoned the odwar of the Guard, who would be in our world a general, and she told him to clear the palace of every living being from the temple level to the roof an hour before the evening meal, nor to permit any one to enter the temple or the levels above it until the hour appointed for the assembling in the temple to hear the word of Tur, excepting however those who might be in her own apartments, which were not to be entered upon pain of death. She made it all very clear and plain and the odwar understood and I think he trembled a trifle for all were in great fear of the jeddara Xaxa, and then he went away and the slaves were dismissed and we were alone.

CHAPTER XIV

John Carter

HALF an hour before the evening meal we carried Xaxa and Sag Or down the spiral runway and placed them in the base of the Great Tur and Gor Hajus and I took our places on the upper platform behind the eyes and voice of the idol. Valla Dia, Dar Tarus and Hovan Du remained in the royal apartment. Our plans were well formulated. There was no one between the door at the rear of the Great Tur and the flier that lay ready on the roof in the event that we were forced to flee through any miscarriage of our mad scheme.

The minutes dragged slowly by and darkness fell. The time was approaching. We heard the doors of the temple open and beyond we saw the great corridor, brilliantly lighted. It was empty except for two priests who stood hesitating nervously in the doorway. Finally one of them mustered up sufficient courage to enter and switch on the lights. More bravely now they advanced and prostrated themselves before the altar of the Great Tur. When they arose and looked up into the face of the idol I could not resist the temptation to turn those huge eyes until they had rolled completely about the interior of the chamber and rested again upon the priests; but I did not speak and I think the effect of the awful silence in the presence of the living god was more impressive than would words have been. The two priests simply collapsed. They slid to the floor and lay there trembling, moaning and supplicating Tur to have mercy on them, nor did they rise before the first of the worshippers arrived.

Thereafter the temple filled rapidly and I could see that the word of Tur had been well and thoroughly disseminated. They came as they had before, but there were more this time, and they ranged upon either side of the central aisle and there they waited, their eyes divided between the doorway and the god. About the time that

I thought the next scene was about to be enacted I let Tur's eyes travel over the assemblage that they might be keyed to the proper pitch for what was to follow. They reacted precisely as had the priests, falling upon the floor and moaning and supplicating and there they remained until the sounds of bugles announced the coming of the Jeddara. Then they rose unsteadily to their feet. The great doors swung open and there was the carpet and the slaves behind it and as they rolled it down toward the altar the bugles sounded louder and the head of the royal procession came into view. I had ordered it thus to permit of greater pageantry than was possible when the doors opened immediately upon the head of the procession. My plan permitted the audience to see the royal retinue advancing down the long corridor and the effect was splendid. First came the double rank of nobles and behind these the chariot drawn by the two banths, bearing the litter upon which reclined Valla Dia. Behind her walked Dar Tarus, but all within that room thought that they were looking upon the jeddara Xaxa and her favorite, Sag Or. Hovan Du walked behind Sag Or and following came the fifty young men and the fifty maidens.

The chariot halted before the altar and Valla Dia descended and knelt and the voices that had been chanting the praises of Xaxa were stilled as the beautiful creature extended her hands toward the Great Tur and looked up into his face.

"We are ready, Master!" she cried. "Speak! We await the word of Tur!"

A gasp arose from the kneeling assemblage, a gasp that ended in a sob. I felt that they were pretty well worked up and that everything ought to go off without a hitch. I placed the speaking tube to my lips.

"I am Tur!" I thundered and the people trembled. "I come to pass judgment on the men of Phundahl. As you receive my word so shall you prosper or so shall you perish. The sins of the people may be atoned by two who have sinned most in my sight." I let the eyes of Tur rove about over the audience and then brought them to rest upon Valla Dia. "Xaxa, are you ready to atone for your sins and for the sins of your people?"

Valla Dia bowed her beautiful head. "Thy will is law, Master!" she replied.

"And Sag Or," I continued; "you have sinned. Are you prepared to pay?"

"As Tur shall require," said Dar Tarus.

"Then it is my will," I boomed, "that Xaxa and Sag Or shall give back to those from whom they stole them, the beautiful bodies they now wear and that the form whom Sag Or took this body shall become Jeddak of Phundahl and High Priest of Tur, and that she from whom Xaxa stole her body shall be returned in pomp to her native country. I have spoken. Let any who would revolt against the word of Tur speak now or forever hold their peace."

There was no objection voiced. I had felt pretty certain that there would be none. I doubt if any god ever looked down upon a more subdued and chastened flock. As I had talked Gor Hajus had descended to the base of the idol and removed the bonds from the feet and legs of Xaxa and Sag Or.

"Extinguish the lights!" I commanded. A trembling priest did my bidding.

Valla Dia and Dar Tarus were standing side by side before the altar when the lights went out and in the next minute they and Gor Hajus must have worked fast, for when I heard a low whistle from the interior of the idol base, the prearranged signal that Gor Hajus had finished his work, and ordered the lights on again, there stood Xaxa and Sag Or where Valla Dia and Dar Tarus had stood before and the latter were nowhere in sight. I think the dramatic effect of that transformation upon the people

there was the most stupendous thing I have ever seen. There was no cord or gag upon either Xaxa or Sag Or, nothing to indicate that they had been brought hither by force—no one about who might have so brought them. The illusion was perfect—it was a gesture of omnipotence that simply staggered the intellect. But I wasn't through.

"You have heard Xaxa renounce her throne," I said, "and Sag Or submit to the judgment of Tur."

"I have not renounced my throne!" cried Xaxa. "It is all a—"

"Silence!" I thundered. "Prepare to greet the new jeddak, Dar Tarus of Phundahl!" I turned my eyes toward the great doors and the eyes of the assemblage followed mine. They swung open and there stood Dar Tarus, resplendent in the trappings of Hora San, the long dead jeddak and high priest, whose bones we had robbed in the base of the idol an hour earlier. How Dar Tarus had managed to make the change so quickly is beyond me, but he had done it and the effect was colossal. He looked every inch a jeddak as he moved with slow dignity up the wide aisle along the blue and gold and white carpet. Xaxa turned purple with rage. "Impostor!" she shrieked. "Seize him! Kill him!" and she ran forward to meet him as though she would slay him with her bare hands, for we had seen to it that she was left no weapon.

"Take her away," said Dar Tarus in a quiet voice, and at that Xaxa fell foaming to the floor. She shrieked and gasped and then lay still—a wicked old woman dead of apoplexy. And when Sag Or saw her lying there he must have been the first to realize that she was dead and that there was now no one to protect him from the hatreds that are levelled always at the person of a ruler's favorite. He looked wildly about for an instant and then threw himself at the feet of Dar Tarus.

"You promised to protect me!" he cried.

"None shall harm you," replied Dar Tarus. "Go your way and live in peace," and then he turned his eyes upward toward the face of the Great Tur. "What is thy will, Master?" he cried. "Dar Tarus, thy servant, awaits thy commands!"

I permitted an impressive silence before I replied.

"Let the priests of Tur, the lesser nobles and a certain number of the Jeddak's Guard go forth into the city and spread the word of Tur among the people that they may know that Tur smiles again upon Phundahl and that they have a new jeddak who stands high in the favor of Tur. Let the higher nobles attend presently in the chambers that were Xaxa's and do honor to Valla Dia in whose perfect body their jeddara once ruled them and effect the necessary arrangements for her proper return to Duhor, her native city. There also will they find two who have served Tur well and these shall be accorded the hospitality and friendship of every Phundahlian—Gor Hajus of Toonol and Vad Varo of Jasoom. Go! and when the last has gone let the temple be darkened. I, Tur, have spoken!"

Valla Dia had gone directly to the apartment of the former Jeddara and the moment that the lights were extinguished Gor Hajus and I joined her. She could not wait to hear the outcome of our ruse and when I assured her that there had been no hitch the tears came to her eyes for very joy.

"You have accomplished the impossible, my chieftain," she murmured, "and already can I see the hills of Duhor and the towers of my native city. Ah, Vad Varo, I had not dreamed that life might again hold for me such happy prospects. I owe you life and more than life."

We were interrupted by the coming of Dar Tarus and with him were Hovan Du and a number of the higher nobles. The latter received us pleasantly, though I think they were mystified as to just how we were linked with the

service of their god; nor, I am sure, did one of them ever learn. They were frankly delighted to be rid of Xaxa, and while they could not understand Tur's purpose in elevating a former warrior of the Guard to the throne yet they were content if it served to relieve them from the wrath of their god, now a very real and terrible god, since the miracles that had been performed in the temple. That Dar Tarus had been of a noble family relieved them of embarrassment and I noted that they treated him with great respect, and I was positive that they would continue to treat him so, for he was also high priest and for the first time in a hundred years he would bring to the Great Tur of the Royal Temple the voice of god, for Hovan Du had agreed to take service with Dar Tarus, and Gor Hajus as well, so that there would never be lacking a tongue where-with Tur might speak. I foresaw great possibilities for the reign of Dar Tarus, Jeddak of Phundahl.

At the meeting held in the apartment of Xaxa it was decided that Valla Dia should rest two days in Phundahl while a small fleet was preparing to transport her to Duhor. Dar Tarus assigned Xaxa's apartments for her use and gave her slaves from different cities to attend upon her, all of whom were to be freed and returned with Valla Dia to her native land.

It was almost dawn before we sought our sleeping silks and furs and the sun was high before we awoke. Gor Hajus and I breakfasted with Valla Dia, outside of whose door we had spread our beds that we might not leave her unprotected for a moment that it was not necessary, and we had scarce finished our meal when a messenger came from Dar Tarus summoning us to the audience chamber, where we found some of the higher officers of the court gathered about the throne upon which Dar Tarus sat, looking every inch an emperor. He greeted us kindly, rising and descending from his dais to receive Valla Dia and escort her to one of the benches he had had placed beside the throne for her and for me.

"There is one," he said to me, "who has come to Phundahl over night and now begs audience of the jeddak—one whom I thought you might like to meet again," and he signed to one of his attendants to admit the petitioner and when the doors at the opposite end of the room opened I saw Ras Thavas standing there. He did not recognize me or Valla Dia or Gor Hajus until he was almost at the foot of the throne and when he did he looked puzzled and glanced again quickly at Dar Tarus.

"Ras Thavas of the Tower of Thavas, Toonol," announced the officer who had conducted Ras Thavas to the throne.

"What would Ras Thavas of the jeddak of Phundahl?" asked Dar Tarus.

"I came seeking audience of Xaxa," replied Ras Thavas, "not knowing of her death or your accession until this very morning; but I see Sag Or upon Xaxa's throne and beside him one whom I thought was Xaxa, though they tell me Xaxa is dead, and another who was my assistant at Thavas and one who is the Assassin of Toonol and I am confused, Jeddak, and do not know whether I be among friends or foes."

"Speak as though Xaxa still sat upon the throne of Phundahl," Dar Tarus told him, "for though I am Dar Tarus, whom you wronged, and not Sag Or, yet need you have no fear in the court of Phundahl."

"Then let me tell you that Vobis Kan, Jeddak of Toonol, learning that Gor Hajus had escaped me swore that I had set him free to assassinate him and he sent warriors who took my island and would have imprisoned me had I not been warned in time to escape, and I came hither to Xaxa to beg her to send warriors to drive the men of Toonol from my island and restore it to me that I may carry on my scientific labors."

Dar Tarus turned to me. "Vad Varo, of all others you are most familiar with the work of Ras Thavas. Would you see him again restored to his island and his laboratory?"

"Only on condition that he devote his great skill to the amelioration of human suffering," I replied, "and no longer prostitute it to the foul purposes of greed and sin," and this led to a discussion which lasted for hours, the results of which were of far reaching significance. Ras Thavas agreed to all that I required and Dar Tarus commissioned Gor Hajus to head an army against Toonol.

But these matters, while of vast interest to those most directly concerned, have no direct bearing upon the story of my adventures upon Barsoom as I had no part in them, since upon the second day I boarded a flier with Valla Dia and, escorted by a Phundahlian fleet set out toward Duhor. Dar Tarus accompanied us for a short distance and when the fleet was stopped at the shore of the great marsh he bade us farewell and was about to step to the deck of his own ship and return to Phundahl when a shout arose from the deck of one of the other ships and word was soon passed that a lookout had sighted what appeared to be a great fleet far to the south-west. Nor was it long before it became plainly visible to us all and equally plain that it was headed for Phundahl.

Dar Tarus told me then that as much as he regretted it there seemed nothing to do but return at once to his capital with the entire fleet, since he could not spare a single ship or man if this proved an enemy fleet, nor could Valla Dia or I interpose any objection, and so we turned about and sped as rapidly as the slow ships of Phundahl permitted back toward the city.

The stranger fleet had sighted us at about the same time that we had sighted it and we saw it change its course and bear down upon us, and as it came nearer, it fell into single file and prepared to encircle us. I was standing at Dar Tarus' side when the colors of the approaching fleet became distinguishable and we first learned that it was from Helium.

"Signal and ask if they come in peace," directed Dar Tarus.

"We seek word with Xaxa, Jeddak of Phundahl," came the reply. "The question of peace or war will be hers to decide."

"Tell them that Xaxa is dead and that I, Dar Tarus, Jeddak of Phundahl, will receive the commander of Helium's fleet in peace upon the deck of this ship, or that I will receive him in war with all my guns. I, Dar Tarus, have spoken!"

From the bow of a great ship of Helium there broke the flag of truce and when Dar Tarus' ship answered it in kind the other drew near and presently we could see the men of Helium upon her decks. Slowly the great flier came along side our smaller ship and when the two had been made fast a party of officers boarded us. They were fine looking men and at their head was one whom I recognized immediately though I never before had laid eyes upon him. I think he was the most impressive figure I have ever seen as he advanced slowly across the deck toward us—John Carter, Prince of Helium, Warlord of Barsoom.

"Dar Tarus," he said, "John Carter greets you and in peace, though it had been different, I think, had Xaxa still reigned."

"You came to war upon Xaxa?" asked Dar Tarus.

"We came to right a wrong," replied the Warlord; "but from what we know of Xaxa that could have been done only by force of arms."

"What wrong has Phundahl done Helium?" demanded Dar Tarus.

"The wrong was against one of your own people—even against you in person."

"I do not understand," said Dar Tarus.

"There is one aboard my ship who may be able to explain to you, Dar Tarus," replied John Carter, with a smile. He turned and spoke to one of his aides in a whisper, and the man saluted and returned to the deck of his own ship. "You shall see with your own eyes, Dar Tarus." Suddenly his eyes narrowed. "This is indeed Dar Tarus who was a warrior of the jeddara's guard and supposedly assassinated by her command?"

"It is," replied Dar Tarus.

"I must be certain," said the Warlord.

"There is no question about it, John Carter," I spoke up in English.

His eyes went wide, and when they fell upon me and he noted my lighter skin, from which the dye was wearing away, he stepped forward and held out his hand.

"A countryman?" he asked.

"Yes, an American," I replied.

"I was almost surprised," he said; "yet why should I be? I have crossed—there is no reason why others should not. And you have accomplished it! You must come to Helium with me and tell me all about it."

Further conversation was interrupted by the return of

the aide, who brought a young woman with him. At sight of her Dar Tarus uttered a cry of joy and sprang forward. I did not need to be told that this was Kara Vasa.

There is little more to tell that might not bore you in the telling—of how John Carter himself took Valla Dia and me to Duhor after attending the nuptials of Dar Tarus and Kara Vasa, and of the great surprise that awaited me in Duhor, where I learned for the first time that Kor San, Jeddak of Duhor, was the father of Valla Dia, and of the honors that he heaped upon me and the great riches when Valla Dia and I were wed.

John Carter was present at the wedding and we initiated upon Barsoom a good old American custom, for the Warlord acted as best man, and then he insisted that we follow that up with a honeymoon and bore us off to Helium where I am writing this.

Even now it seems like a dream that I can look out of my window and see the scarlet and the yellow towers of the twin cities of Helium; that I have met, and see daily, Carthoris, Thuvia of Ptarth, Tara of Helium, Gahan of Gathol and that peerless creature, Dejah Thoris, Princess of Mars; though to me, beautiful as she is, there is another even more beautiful—Valla Dia, Princess of Duhor—Mrs. Ulysses Paxton.

THE END.



The FACE IN THE ABYSS

By *A. Merritt*

Author of "The Moon Pool"



He saw—the Snake Mother! At one and the same time real and unreal, she lay stretched out upon the radiant air, her shining lengths half coiled.... Her purple eyes were intent upon him. Through this

phantom of the Snake Mother—if phantom it was—he stared full and fearlessly into the eyes of the Face. And their spell was broken. All that he saw now was its rapacity, its ruthlessness and its horror.

CHAPTER I.

Out of the Haunted Hills

IT has just been three years since I met Nicholas Graydon in the little Andean village of Chupan, high on the eastern slopes of the Peruvian uplands. I had stopped there to renew my supplies, expecting to stay not more than a day or two. But after my *arrieros* had unlimbered my luggage from the two burros, and I entered the unusually clean and commodious *posada*, its keeper told me that another North American was stopping there.

He would be very glad to see me, since he was very ill and there was no other *Americanos* in the hamlet. Yes, he was so ill that he was, to tell me all the truth, certain to die, and it would beyond doubt comfort him much to have a fellow countryman with him when that sad moment came. That is, he added, if he were able to recognize a fellow countryman, since all the time the *señor* had been at the *posada* he had been out of his mind with fever, and would probably pass away so.

Then with a curiously intense anxiety he implored me to stay on until death did come; a matter, he assured me, that could be one of only a few days—maybe hours.

I bluntly asked him whether his desire for me to remain was through solicitude for my ailing countryman or through fear for himself. And after a little hesitation he answered that it was both. The *señor* had come to the village a week before, with one burro and neither guides nor *arrieros*. He had been very weak, as though from privations and long journeying. But weaker far from a wound on his neck which had become badly infected. The wound seemed to have been made by either an arrow or a spear. The *señor* had been taken care of as well as the limited knowledge of the *cura* and himself permitted. His burro had been looked after and his saddlebags kept scrupulously closed. But I could understand that questions might be raised after the *señor's* death. If I remained I could report to the authorities that everything possible had been done for the *señor's* comfort and testify that none in Chupan was responsible for his injuries.

This did not sound very convincing to me, and I said so. Then the worthy innkeeper revealed what actually was in his mind. The *señor*, he said, had spoken in his ravings, of dreadful things, both accursed and devilish. What were they?

Well—he crossed himself—if I remain I would no doubt hear for myself. But they had even greatly disturbed the good *cura*, despite that he was under the direct protection of God. The *señor* had come, so his ravings indicated, from a haunted place—no less a place, the innkeeper whispered crossing himself again, than the shunned Cordillera de Carabaya, which every one knew was filled with evil spirits. Yes, evil spirits which would not lightly give up any one who had once been in their power!

And, in fine, the idea seemed to be that some of these demons of the Cordillera—about which, as a matter of fact, I had heard some strange tales—might come at any time for the sick man. If they did, they would be more apt to wreak their fury on one of the *señor's* own countrymen—especially if he was in the same room. The keeper of the *posada* did not put it that way, of course; he said that one of his own people was better qualified to protect the *señor* in such case than any strangers were. Nevertheless the

theory plainly was that if I stayed I would act as a lightning rod for any levin of hell that might strike!

I went to the room of the sick man. At first glance I could see that here was no *anderine*, no mountain vagabond. Neither fever nor scrub beard could hide the fineness, the sensitivity, the intelligence of the face on which I looked. He was, I judged, about thirty, and he was an ill man indeed. His temperature showed 105 point 6. At the moment he was in delirium.

My first shock of surprise came when I examined his wound. It seemed to me more like the stab of some great bird peak than the work of a spear or arrow. It was a puncture—or better, perhaps, a punch—clear through the muscles of the back and left shoulder and base of the neck. It had missed the arteries of the last by the narrowest of margins. I knew of no bird which could make such a wound as this, yet the closer I looked and probed the more sure I was that it had been inflicted by no weapon of man.

That night, after I had arranged my own matters and had him sleeping under a hypodermic, I opened up his saddlebags. Papers in them showed his name to be Nicholas Graydon, a mining engineer, a graduate of the Harvard School of Mines, his birthplace, Philadelphia. There was a diary that revealed so much of him truly likable that had I not already made up my mind to stop on with him it would have impelled me to do so. Its last entry was about a month before and ran:

Two weeks now since our *arrieros* deserted us, and we seem to be pretty thoroughly lost. Effects upon the three are curious. Sterrett manages to keep himself evenly drunk all the time. That spare burro of his must be loaded with nothing but that Indian hell-brew. Dancre is moody and sullen. Soames seems to have developed a morbid suspicion of all of us. Strange how the wilderness, the jungle, the desert, bring out the latent man in all of us. In Quito none of the three was half bad. But now—well, the luckiest thing for me will be for us to find no treasure. If we do, my throat will probably be the first to be cut.

Further down the bag were two parcels, each most carefully and securely wrapped. Opening the first I found a long black feather oddly marked with white. I did not recognize the plume as belonging to any bird I knew. Its shaft was inlaid with little bands of gold, altogether a curiously delicate bit of goldsmith's work.

But the contents of the second package made me gasp in amazement. It was a golden bracelet, clearly exceedingly ancient, the band an inch broad and expanding into an oval disk perhaps three inches long by two wide. That wisk held in high relief the most extraordinary bit of carving I had ever seen. Four monsters held on unlifted paws, a bowl on which laid coiled a serpent with a woman's face and woman's breasts. Nor had I ever beheld such suggestion of united wisdom and weirdness as the maker had stamped upon the snake woman's face.

Yet it was not that which called forth the full measure of my wonder; no. There are certain pictures, certain sculptures, certain works of art which carry to their beholders conviction that no fantasy, no imagination, went into their making and that they are careful, accurate copies of something seen by those who made them. This bit of golden carving carried that conviction.

The four monsters which held up the snake woman were—dinosaurs!

There was no mistaking them. I had examined too many of the reconstructions made by scientists from the fossil bones of these gigantic, monstrous reptilian creatures

HERE is an excellent story by the author of THE MOON POOL, a story so different, so fascinating, that you feel yourself transported into an entirely new and different sort of world. The science, as usual, is excellent, and there is enough adventure in the story to satisfy the most blasé.

On the other hand, the theme of the story is so original that we have asked Mr. Merritt to write a sequel to it. Further announcement in regard to the sequel will soon be made in the pages of AMAZING STORIES. At any rate, tell us what you think of it.

to be in error. But these giants were supposed to have died off millions of years before man first appeared on earth! Yet here they were, carved with such fidelity to detail, such impress of photographic accuracy, that it was impossible to believe that the ancient goldsmith who made this thing had not had before him living models!

Marveling, I held the bracelet closer to the light and as I did so I thought I heard far away in the blackness of the mountains and high in air a sound like a tiny bugle. In that note was something profoundly, alienly weird. I went to the window and listened, but the sound did not come again. I turned to find the eyes of Graydon opened and regarding me. For a moment he had slipped from the thrall of the fever—and the thought came to me that it had been the elfin bugling which had awakened him.

It was six weeks before I had Graydon well out of danger. And in that time he had told me bit by bit that well nigh incredible experience of his in the haunted hills of the Cordillera de Carabaya and what it was that had sent him so far down into the valley of the shadow.

Three years it has been since then. Three years and I have heard nothing of him. Three years and he has not returned from his journey back to the Cordillera de Carabaya where he went to seek mystery, ancient beyond all memory of man, he believed was hidden there. But more than that—to seek Suarra.

"If you don't hear from me in three years, tell the story and let the people who knew me know what became of me," he said, as I left him at the beginning of that strange trail he had determined to retrace.

And so I tell it, reconstructing it from his reticences as well as his confidences, since only so may a full measure of judgment of that story be gained.

CHAPTER II.

Suarra of the Golden Spears

GRAYDON had run into Sterrett in Quito. Or, rather, Sterrett sought him out there. Graydon had often heard of the giant West Coast adventurer, but their trails had never crossed. It was with a lively curiosity, then, that he opened the door of his room to his visitor.

And he had rather liked Sterrett. There was a bluff directness about the big man that made him overlook a certain cruelty of eye and a touch of brutality about mouth and jaw.

Sterrett came to the point at once. Graydon had no doubt heard the story of the treasure train which had been bringing to Pizarro the ransom of the Inca Atahualpa? And learning of the murder of that monarch had turned back and buried that treasure somewhere in the Peruvian wilderness? Graydon had heard of it, hundreds of times. And, like every other adventurer in the Andes, spent a little time himself searching for those countless millions in jewels and gold.

Sterrett nodded.

"I know how to find it," he said.

And Graydon had laughed. How many had told him that they, too, knew where lay hidden the hoard of Atahualpa the Inca!

But in the end Sterrett convinced him; convinced him at least that there was something more solid than usual in the story, something decidedly worth looking into.

There would be two others in the expedition, Sterrett told him, both men long associated with him. One was Dancre, a Frenchman, the other an American named Soames. These two had been with Sterrett when he had got hold of the old parchment with its alleged map of the treasure trail, and with its carefully drawn signs that pur-

ported to be copies of those along that trail; signs cut by its makers to guide those who one day, when the Spaniard was gone, would set out to recover the hidden hoard.

Graydon asked why they wanted him. Sterrett bluntly enough told him—because he was an American; because they knew he could be trusted; because he could afford to pay half the expenses of the expedition. He, Dancre and Soames would pay the other half. They would all share equally if the treasure was found. Still another reason, Graydon was a mining engineer and his special knowledge might be essential when it came to recovering the stuff. Furthermore, if the treasure was not found, the region where they were going was full of minerals. He might make some valuable discoveries. In which event all would share equally as before.

There were no calls on Graydon at the time. It was true that he could well afford the cost. At the worst there would be adventure and some pleasant excitement. He met Dancre and Soames, the first a cynical, but amusing little bunch of wires and nerves, the second a lanky, saturnine, hardbitten Yankee. They had gone down by rail to Cerro de Pasco for their outfit, that being the town of any size closest to where, according to the map, their trail into the wilderness began. A week later, with eight burros and six *arrieros* or packmen, they were well within the welter of peaks through which the old map indicated their road lay.

They found the signs cut in the rocks exactly as the parchment had promised. Gay, spirits high with anticipation, three of them at least spending in advance their share of the treasure, they followed the symbols. Steadily they were led into the uncharted wilderness.

At last the *arrieros* began to murmur. They were approaching, they said, a region that was accursed, the Cordillera de Carabaya, where demons dwelt and only fierce Aymaras, their servants, lived. Promises of more money, threats, pleadings, took them along a little farther.

Then one morning the four awoke to find the *arrieros* gone—and with them half the burros and a portion of their supplies.

They pressed on. Then suddenly, the signs had failed them. Either they had lost the trail, or there were no more carven symbols and the parchment which had led them truthfully so far had lied at the last. Or was it possible that the signs had been obliterated—cut away?

The country into which they had penetrated was a strangely deserted one. They saw no signs of Indians—had seen none indeed since when, more than a week before, they had stopped at a Quincha village and Sterrett had got mad drunk on the fiery spirit the Quichas distill. Food, too, was curiously hard to find, there were few animals and fewer birds.

But worst of all was the change that had come over his companions. As high as they had been lifted by their certainty of success, just so deep were they now cast into despair. The wilderness, the loneliness of it, their disappointment, had brought out the real man that lies hidden beneath the veneer we all of us carry. Sterrett kept himself at a steady level of drunkenness, alternately quarrelsome and noisy or sunk in a sullen mood of brooding, brutal rage. Dancre had become silent and irritable. Soames seemed to have reached the conclusion that Graydon, Sterrett and the Frenchman had combined against him; that they had either deliberately missed the trail or had erased the signs. Only when the two of them joined Sterrett and drank with him the Quicha hell-brew did either of them relax. At such times Graydon had an uneasy feeling that they were holding the failure against him and that his life might be hanging on a thin thread.

On the day his adventure really began—the strange adventure to which all that had passed before had been

prelude—Graydon was coming back to the camp. He had been hunting since morning. Dancre and Soames had gone off together on another desperate search for their missing symbols that would lead them to the treasure trail again.

Cut off in mid-flight, the girl's cry came to him as the answer to all his apprehensions; materialization of the menace toward which his vague fears had been groping ever since he had left Sterrett alone at the camp hours ago. He had sensed some culminating misfortune close—and here it was! He knew it; how, he did not stop himself to ask; he was sure. He broke into a run, stumbling up the slope to the group of gray green *algarroba* trees where the tent was pitched.

WHAT had the drunken fool done? Graydon had warned them all that their situation was perilous; that if Indians came they must try to make friends with them—that they must be superlatively careful in their treatment of any Indian women.

He reached the *algarrobas*; crashed through the light undergrowth to the little clearing. Why didn't the girl cry out again, he wondered. There was a sickness at his heart. A low chuckle reached him, thick, satyr toned. Then Sterrett's voice, cruel, mocking!

"No more fight in you, eh? Well, which'll it be, pretty lady—the way to the gold or you? And by Heaven—I guess it'll be you—first!"

For an instant Graydon paused. He saw that Sterrett, half crouching, was holding the girl bow fashion over one knee. A thick arm was clinched about her neck the fingers clutching her mouth brutally, silencing her; his right hand fettered her slender wrists; her knees were caught in the vise of his bent right leg.

She was helpless; but as Graydon sprang forward he caught a flash of wide black eyes, wrath filled and defiant, staring fearlessly into those leering so close.

He caught Sterrett by the hair, locked an arm under his chin, drawing his head sharply back.

"Drop her!" he ordered. "Drop her—quick!"

Sterrett hurled himself to his feet, dropping the girl as he rose.

"What the hell are you butting in for?" he snarled. His hand struck down toward his pistol. But even while the fingers were tightening around the butt, Graydon's fist shot out and caught him on the point of the hairy jaw. The clutching fingers loosened, the half drawn pistol slipped to the ground, the great body quivered and toppled over. Long before it fell the girl had leaped up and away.

Graydon did not look after her. She had gone no doubt to bring down upon them her people, some tribe of the fierce Aymaras that even the Incas of old had never quite conquered and who would avenge her—in ways that Graydon did not like to visualize.

He bent down over Sterrett. His heart was beating; feebly it was true—but beating. The reek of drink was sickening. Graydon's hand touched the fallen pistol. He picked it up and looked speculatively at the fallen man's rifle. Sterrett, between the blow and the drink, would probably be out of the running for hours. He wished that Dancre and Soames would get back soon to camp. The three of them could put up a good fight at any rate; might even have a chance for escape. So ran his thoughts. But Dancre and Soames would have to return quickly. The girl would soon be there—with the avengers; no doubt at this very moment she was telling them of her wrongs. He turned—

She stood there; looking at him!

And drinking in her loveliness, Graydon forgot the man at his feet; forgot all, and was content to let his soul sit undisturbed within his eyes and take its delight to her.

Her skin was palest ivory. It gleamed translucent

through the rent of the soft amber fabric like the thickest silk that swathed her. Her eyes were deep velvety pools, oval, a little tilted; Egyptian in the wide midnight of their irises. But the features were classic, cameo; the nose small and straight, the brows level and black, almost melting above it! And her hair was cloudy jet, misty and shadowed, and a narrow fillet of gold bound the broad, low forehead. In it like a diamond were entwined the sable and silver feathers of the *caraquenque*, that bird whose plumage in lost centuries was sacred to the princesses of the Incas alone. Above her dimpled elbows golden bracelets twined, reaching to the slender shoulders. The little, high arched feet were shod with high buskins of deerskin.

She was light and slender as the Willow Maid who waits on Kwannon when she passes into the World of Trees to pour into them new fire of green life—and like the Willow Maid green fire of tree and jungle and flame of woman gleamed within her.

Nothing so exquisite, so beautiful had ever Graydon beheld. Here was no Aymara, no daughter of any tribe of the Cordilleras, no descendant of Incas. Nor was she Spanish. There were bruises on her cheeks—the marks of Sterrett's cruel fingers. Her long, slim hands touched them. The red lips opened. She spoke—in the Aymara tongue.

"Is he dead?" she asked—her voice was low, a faint chime as of little bells ringing through it.

"No," Graydon answered.

In the depths of the midnight eyes a small hot flame flared; he could have sworn it was of gladness; it vanished as swiftly as it had come.

"That is well," she said. "I would not have him die—" the voice became meditative—"so!"

"Who are you?" Graydon asked wonderingly. She looked at him for a long moment enigmatically.

"Call me—Suarra," she answered at last.

Sterrett stirred, groaned. The girl gazed down upon him. The slim hand touched once more the bruises on her cheek.

"He is very strong," she murmured.

Graydon thought there was admiration in the voice; wondered whether all that delectable beauty was after all but a mask for primitive woman, worshipping brute strength; looked into the eyes scanning Sterrett's bulk, noted the curious speculation within them, and knew that whatever the reason for her comment it was not that which his fleeting thought had whispered. She looked at him, questioningly.

"Are you his enemy?" she asked.

"No," said Graydon, "we travel together."

"Then why," she pointed to the outstretched figure, "why did you do this to him? Why did you not let him have his way with me?"

Graydon flushed, uncomfortably. The question, with all its subtle implications, cut. What kind of a beast did she think him? His defense of her had been elementary—as well be asked to explain why he did not stand by and watch idly while a child was being murdered!

"What do you think I am?" His voice shook with half shamed wrath. "No man stands by and lets a thing like that go on."

She looked at him, curiously; but her eyes had softened.

"No?" she asked. "No man does? Then what is he?"

Graydon found no answer. She took a step closer to him, her slim fingers again touching the bruises on her cheek.

"Do you not wonder," she said—"now do you not wonder why I do not call my people to deal him the punishment he has earned?"

"I do wonder," Graydon's perplexity was frank. "I wonder indeed. Why do you not call them—if they are close enough to hear?"

"And what would you do were they to come?" she whispered.

"I would not let them have him—alive," he answered. "Nor me!"

"Perhaps," she said, slowly, "perhaps—knowing that—is why—I do not call them!"

Suddenly she smiled upon him—and it was as though a draft of wild sweet wine had been lifted to his lips. He took a swift step toward her. She drew up to her slim lithe height, thrust out a warning hand.

"I am—Suarra," she said; then "and I am—Death!"

And odd chill passed through Graydon. Again he realized the unfamiliar, the alien beauty of her. Was there truth after all in those legends of the haunted Cordillera? He had never doubted that there was something behind the terror of the Indians, the desertion of the *arrieros*. Was she one of its spirits, its—demons? For an instant the fantasy seemed no fantasy. Then reason returned. This girl a demon! He laughed.

She frowned at that laughter.

"Do not laugh," she said. "The death I mean is not such as you who live beyond the high rim of our land may know. It is death that blots out not alone the body, but that lord whose castle is the body; that which looks out through the windows of your eyes—that presence, that flame, you believe can never die. That, too, our death blots out; makes as though it never had been. Or letting it live, changes it in—dreadful—ways. Yet, because you came to me in my need—nay, more because of something I sense within you—something that calls out to me and to which I must listen and do desire to listen—because of this I would not have death come to you."

Strange as were her words, Graydon hardly heard them; certainly did not then realize fully their meaning, lost still as he was in wonder.

What was this girl doing here in these wild mountains with her bracelets of gold and the royal Inca feathers on her lovely little head? No demon of the wilderness, she! Absurd! She was living, desirable, all human.

Yet she was of no race he knew. Despite the *caraqueñe* plumes—not of the Incas.

But she was of pure blood—the blood of kings. Yes, that was it—a princess of some proud empire, immemorably ancient, long lost! But what empire?

"How you came by the watchers, I do not know. How you passed unseen by them I do not know. Nor how you came so far within this forbidden land. Tell me," her voice was imperious, "why came you here at all?"

Graydon stirred. It was a command.

"We came from afar," he said, "on the track of a great treasure of gold and gems; the treasure of Atahualpa, the Inca. There were certain signs that led us. They brought us here. And here we lost them. And found soon that we, too, were lost."

"Atahualpa," she nodded. "Yes, his people did come here. We took them—and their treasure!"

Graydon stared at her, jaw dropping in amazement.

"You—you took them—and the treasure!" he gasped.

"YES," she nodded, indifferently, "it lies somewhere in one of the thirteen caves. It was nothing to us—to us of Yu-Atlanchi where treasures are as the sands in the stream bed. A grain of sand, it was, among many. But the people of Atahualpa were welcome—since we needed new folks to care for the Xinli and to feed the wisdom of the Snake Mother."

"The Snake Mother!" exclaimed Graydon.

The girl touched the bracelet on her right arm. And Graydon, looking close, saw that this bracelet held a disk on which was carved a serpent with a woman's head and woman's breasts and arms. It lay coiled upon a great dish

held high on the paws of four animals. The shapes of these did not at once register upon his consciousness—so absorbed was he in his study of that coiled figure.

And now he saw that this face was not really that of a woman. It was reptilian. But so strongly had the maker feminized it, so great was the suggestion of womanhood modeled into every line of it, that constantly the eyes saw it as woman, forgetting all that was of the serpent.

Her eyes were of some small, glittering, intensely purple stone. And as Graydon looked he felt that those eyes were alive—that far, far away some living thing was looking at him through them. That they were, in fact, prolongations of someone's—some *thing's*—vision!

And suddenly the figure seemed to swell, the coils to move, the eyes come closer.

He tore his gaze away; drew back, dizzily.

The girl was touching one of the animals that held up the bowl or shield or whatever it was that held the snake woman.

"The Xinli," she said.

Graydon looked; looked and felt increase of bewilderment. For he knew what those animals were. And, knowing, knew that he looked upon the incredible.

They were dinosaurs! Those gigantic, monstrous grotesques that ruled earth millions upon millions of years ago, and but for whose extinction, so he had been taught, man could never have developed.

Who in this Andean wilderness could know or could have known the dinosaur? Who here could have carved the monsters with such life-like detail as these possessed? Why, it was only yesterday that science had learned what really were their huge bones, buried so long that the rocks had molded themselves around them in adamantine matrix. And laboriously, with every modern resource still haltingly and laboriously, science had set those bones together as a perplexed child a picture puzzle, and timidly put forth what it believed to be reconstructions of these long vanished chimeras of earth's nightmare youth.

Yet here, far from all science it must surely be, some one had modeled those same monsters for a woman's bracelet. Why then, it followed that whoever had done this must have had before him the living forms from which to work. Or, if not, copies of those forms set down accurately by ancient men who had seen them. And either or both these things were incredible.

What were these people to whom this girl belonged? People who—what was it she had said—could blot out both body and soul or change the soul to some dreadful thing? There had been a name—

Yu-Atlanchi.

"Suarra," he said, "where is Yu-Atlanchi? Is it this place where we are now?"

"This," she laughed. "No! Yu-Atlanchi is the ancient land. The hidden land where the Five Lords and the Lord of Lords once ruled, and where now rules only the Lord of Fate and the Lord of Folly and the Snake Mother! This place Yu-Atlanchi!" again she laughed. "Now and then we hunt here—with the Xinli and the—the" she hesitated, looking at him oddly; then went on. "So it was that he," she pointed to Sterrett, "caught me. I was hunting. I had slipped away from my—my—" again she hesitated, as oddly as before—"my followers, for sometimes I would hunt alone, wander alone. I came through these trees and saw your *tetuane*, your lodge. I came face to face with him. And I was amazed—too amazed to strike with one of these." She pointed to a low knoll a few feet away—"so, before I could conquer that amaze he seized me, choked me. And then you came."

Graydon stared at the place where she had pointed. There upon the ground lay three slender shining spears.

Their slim shafts were of gold; the arrow shaped heads of two of them were of fine opal.

But the third—the third was a single emerald, translucent and flawless, all of six inches long and three at its widest and ground to keenest point and cutting edge!

There it lay, a priceless jewel tipping a spear of gold—and a swift panic shook Graydon. He had forgotten Soames and Dancre! Suppose they should return while this girl was there! This girl with her ornaments of gold, her gem tipped golden spears, and her—beauty! Well, he knew what they could do. And while now he knew, too, how with all his wit and strength he would fight for her, still they were two and armed and cunning, and he only one.

Suddenly he discounted all that tale of hers of a hidden land with its Lords and Snake Mother and its people who dealt out mysterious unfamiliar deaths. If this were all so, why had she come alone into the *algarrobas*? Why was she still alone? As suddenly he saw her only a girl, speaking fantasy, and helpless.

"Suarra," he said, "you must go and go quickly. This man and I are not all. There are two more and even now they may be close. Take your spears, and go quickly. Else I may not be able to save you."

"You think I am—" she began.

"I tell you to go," he answered. "Whoever you are, whatever you are, go now and keep away from this place. To-morrow I will try to lead them back. If you have people to fight for you—well, let them come and fight if you so desire. But take this instant your spears and go."

She crossed to the little knoll and slowly picked them up. She held one out to him, the one that bore the emerald point.

"This," she said, "to remember—Suarra."

"No," he thrust it back. "No."

Once the others saw that jewel never, he knew, would he be able to start them on the back trail—if they could find it. Sterrett had seen it, of course, but that was not like having it in the camp, a constant reminder to Soames and Dancre of what might be unlimited riches within their reach. And he might be able to convince those others that Sterrett's story was but a drunken dream.

The girl regarded him meditatively, a quickened interest in the velvety eyes. She slipped the golden bracelets from her arms, held them out to him with the three spears.

"Will you take all of them—and leave your comrades?" she asked. "Here are gold and gems. They are treasures. They are what you have been seeking. Take them. Take them and go, leaving that man there and those other two. Consent—and I will not only give you these, but show you a way out of this forbidden land."

For a moment Graydon hesitated. The great emerald alone was worth a fortune. What loyalty did he owe after all, to Sterrett and Soames and Dancre? And Sterrett had brought this thing upon himself.

Nevertheless—they were his comrades. Open eyed he had gone into this venture with them.

He had a swift vision of himself skulking away with this glittering, golden booty, creeping off to safety while he left them, unwarned, unprepared to meet—what? Peril, certainly; nay, almost as certainly—death. For whatever the present danger of this girl might be at the hands of his comrades, subconsciously Graydon knew that it must be but a brief one; that she could not be all alone; that although through some chance she had strayed upon the camp, somewhere close were those who would seek for her when they missed her. That somewhere were forces on which she could call and against which it was unlikely three men, even well armed as they were, could prevail.

Very definitely he did not like that picture of himself skulking away from the peril, whatever it might be.

"No," he said. "These men are of my race, my com-

rades. Whatever is to come—I will meet it with them and help them fight it. Now go."

"YET you would have fought them for my sake—did fight," she said, as though perplexed. "Why then do you cling to them when you can save yourself; go free, with treasure? And why, if you will not do this, do you let me go, knowing that if you kept me prisoner, or—slew me, I could not bring my people down upon you?"

Graydon laughed.

"I couldn't let them hurt you, of course," he said, "and I am afraid to make you prisoner, because I might not be able to keep you free from hurt. And I won't run away. So talk no more, but go—go!"

She thrust the gleaming spears into the ground, slipped the golden bracelets back on her arms, held white hands out to him.

"Now," she cried, "now, by the Wisdom of the Snake Mother, by the Five Lords and by the Lord of Lords, I will save you if I can. All that I have tempted you with was but to test that truth which I had hoped was in you and now I know is within you. Now you may go back—nor may they. Here is Yu-Atlanchi and Yu-Atlanchi's power. Into that power you have strayed. Nor have those who have ever so strayed ever escaped. Yet you I will save—if I can!"

Before he could answer her he heard a horn sound; far away and high in air it seemed. Faintly it was answered by others closer by; mellow, questing notes—yet with fairly alien beat in them that subtly checked the pulse of Graydon's heart!

"They come," she said. "My followers! Light your fire to-night. Sleep without fear. But do not wander beyond these trees!"

"Suarra—" he cried.

"Silence now," she warned. "Silence—until I am gone!"

The mellow horns sounded closer. She sprang from his side; darted through the trees.

From the little ridge above the camp he heard her voice raised in one clear, ringing shout. There was a tumult of the horns about her—elfinly troubling. Then silence.

Graydon stood listening. The sun touched the high snowfields of the majestic peaks toward which he faced; touched them and turned them into robes of molten gold. The amethyst shadows that draped their sides thickened, wavered and marched swiftly forward.

Still he listened, scarce breathing.

Far, far away the horns sounded again; faint echoes of the tumult that had swept about Suarra—faint, faint and faerie sweet.

The sun dropped behind the peaks; the edges of their frozen mantles glittered as though sewn with diamonds; darkened into a fringe of gleaming rubies. The golden fields dulled, grew amber and then blushed forth a glowing rose. They changed to pearl and faded into a ghostly silver, shining like cloud wraiths in the highest heavens. Down upon the *algarroba* clump the quick Andean dusk fell.

And not till then did Graydon, shivering with sudden, inexplicable dread, realize that beyond the calling horns and the girl's clear shouting he had heard no other sound—no noise either of man or beast, no sweeping through of brush or grass, no fall of running feet nor clamor of the chase.

Nothing but that mellow chorus of the horns!

From infinite distances, it seemed to him, he heard one single note, sustained and insistent. It detached itself from the silence. It swept toward him with the speed of light. It circled overhead, hovered and darted; arose and sped away; a winged sound bearing some message, carrying some warning—where?

CHAPTER III

The Eyes of the Snake Mother

GRAYDON turned back. He bent over Sterrett who had drifted out of the paralysis of the blow into a drunken stupor. There were deep scratches on the giant's cheeks—the marks of Suarra's nails. The jaw was badly swollen where he had hit it. Graydon dragged him over to the tent, thrust a knapsack under his head and threw a blanket over him. Then he went out and built up the fire.

Hardly had he begun to prepare the supper when he heard a trampling through the underbrush. Soon Soames and Danere came up through the trees.

"Find any signs?" he asked them.

"Signs? Hell—no!" snarled the New Englander. "Say, Graydon, did you hear something like a lot of horns? Damned queer horns, too. They seemed to be over here."

Graydon nodded, abstractedly. Abruptly he realized that he must tell these men what had happened, must warn them and urge them to prepare for defense. But how much should he tell?

All?

Tell them of Suarra's beauty, of her golden ornaments and her gem tipped spears of gold? Tell them what she had said of Atahualpa's treasure and of that ancient Yumatlan where priceless gems were "thick as the sands upon the bed of a stream?"

Well he knew that if he did there would be no further reasoning with them; that they would go berserk with greed. Yet something of it he must tell them if they were to be ready for that assault which he was certain would come with the dawn.

And of Suarra they would learn soon enough from Sterrett when he awakened.

He heard an exclamation from Danere who had passed on into the tent; heard him come out; stood up and faced the wiry little Frenchman.

"What's the matter wit' Sterrett, eh?" Danere snapped. "First I thought he's drunk. Then I see he's scratched like wild cat and wit' a lump on his jaw as big as one orange. What you do to Sterrett, eh?"

Graydon had made up his mind; was ready to answer.

"Danere," he said, "Soames—we're in a bad box. I came in from hunting less than an hour ago and found Sterrett wrestling with a girl. That's bad medicine down here—the worst, and you two know it. I had to knock Sterrett out before I could get the girl away from him. Her people will probably be after us in the morning. There's no use trying to get away. They'll soon enough find us in this wilderness of which we know nothing and they presumably know all. This place is as good as any other to meet them. And it's a better place than any if we have to fight. We'd better spend the night getting it ready so we can put up a good one, if we have to."

"A girl, eh?" said Danere. "What she look like? Where she come from? How she get away?"

Graydon chose the last question to answer.

"I let her go," he said.

"You let her go!" snarled Soames. "What the hell did you do that for, man? Why didn't you tie her up? We could have held her as a hostage, Graydon—had something to do some trading with when her damned bunch of Indians came."

"She wasn't an Indian, Soames," began Graydon, then hesitated.

"You mean she was white—Spanish?" broke in Danere, incredulously.

"No, not Spanish either. She was white. Yes, white

as any of us. I don't know what she was," answered Graydon.

The pair stared at him, then at each other.

"There's something damned funny about this," growled Soames, at last. "But what I want to know is why you let her go, whatever the hell she was?"

"Because I thought we'd have a better chance if I did than if I didn't." Graydon's own wrath was rising. "I want to tell you two that we're up against something mighty bad; something none of us knows anything about. And we've got just one chance of getting out of the mess. If I'd kept her here we wouldn't have even that chance."

He halted. Danere had stooped; had picked up something from the ground, something that gleamed yellow in the firelight. And now the Frenchman nudged the lank New Englander.

"Som'ting funny is right, Soames," he said. "Look at this."

He handed the gleaming object over. Graydon saw that it was a thin golden bracelet, and as Soames turned it over in his hand he caught the green glitter of emeralds. It had been torn from Suarra's arm, he realized, in her struggle with Sterrett.

"Yes, som'ting funny!" repeated Danere. He glared at Graydon venomously, through slitted lids. "What that girl give you to let her go, Graydon, eh?" he spat. "What she tell you, eh?"

Soames's hand dropped to his automatic.

"She gave me nothing, I took nothing," answered Graydon.

"I t'ink you damned liar!" said Danere, viciously. "We get Sterrett awake," he turned to Soames. "We get him awake quick. I t'ink he tell us more about this, *oui*. A girl who wears stuff like this—and he lets her go! Lets her go when he knows there must be more where this come from, eh, Soames. Damned funny is right, eh? Come, now, we see what Sterrett tell us."

GRAYDON watched them go into the tent. Soon Soames came out, went to a spring that bubbled up from among the trees; returned, with water.

Well, let them waken Sterrett; let him tell them whatever he would. They would not kill him that night, of that he was sure. They believed that he knew too much. And in the morning—

What was hidden in the morning for them all?

That even now they were prisoners, Graydon did not doubt. Suarra's warning not to leave the camp had been too explicit. And since that tumult of the cliff horns, her swift vanishing and the silence that had followed he had no longer doubt that they had strayed, as she had said, within the grasp of some power, formidable as it was mysterious.

The silence? Suddenly it came to him that the night had become strangely still. There was no sound either of insect or bird nor any stirring of the familiar after-twilight life of the wilderness.

The camp was ringed with silence!

He strode away, through the *algarroba* clump. There was a scant score of the trees. They stood up like a little leafy island peak within the brush covered savanna. They were great trees, every one of them, and set with a curious regularity as though they had not sprung up by chance; as though indeed they had been carefully planted.

Graydon reached the last of them, rested a hand against the bole that looked like myriads of tiny grubs turned to soft brown wood. He peered out. The slope that lay before him was flooded with moonlight; the yellow blooms of the *chilca* shrubs that pressed to the very feet of the trees shone vainly in the silver flood. The faintly aromatic

fragrance of the *quenuar* stole around him. Movement or sign of life there was none.

And yet—

The spaces seemed filled with watchers; he felt their gaze upon him; knew with an absolute certainty that some hidden host girdled the camp. He scanned every bush and shadow; saw nothing. Nevertheless the certainty of a hidden, unseen multitude persisted. A wave of nervous irritation passed through him. He would force them, whatever they were, to show themselves.

He stepped boldly into the full moonlight.

On the instant the silence intensified; seemed to draw taut; to lift itself up whole octaves of stillnesses; to become alert, expectant—as though poised to spring upon him should he take one step further!

A coldness wrapped him, a shudder shook him. He drew swiftly back to the shadow of the trees; stood there, his heart beating furiously. The silence lost its poignancy, dropped back upon its haunches—but watchful and alert!

What had frightened him? What was there in that tightening of the stillness that had touched him with finger of nightmare terror?

Trembling, he groped back, foot by foot, afraid to turn his back to the silence. Behind him the fire flared. And suddenly his fear dropped from him.

His reaction from the panic was a heady recklessness. He threw a log upon the fire and laughed as the sparks shot up among the leaves. Soames, coming out of the tent for more water, stopped as he heard that laughter and seowled at him malevolently.

"Laugh," he said. "Laugh while you can—you damned traitor. You'll laugh on the other side of your mouth when we get Sterrett up and he tells us what he knows."

"That was a sound sleep I gave him, anyway," jeered Graydon.

"There are sounder sleeps! Don't forget it." It was Dancre's voice, cold and menacing from within the tent. He heard Sterrett groan.

Graydon turned his back to the tent and deliberately faced that silence from which he had just fled. How long he sat thus he did not know. It could not have been for long. But all at once he was aware that he was staring straight into two little points of vivid light that seemed at once far, far away and very close. They were odd, he thought. What was it so odd about them? Was it their color? They were purple, a curiously intense purple. As he stared, it seemed to him that they grew larger, but the puzzling double aspect of distance and nearness did not alter.

It was very curious, he thought. He had seen two eyes—yes, they were eyes—of that peculiar purple somewhere, not long ago. But he could not remember just where—there was a drowsiness clouding his thought. He would look at them no more. He raised his gaze, slowly and with perceptible effort, to the leafy screen above him. Unwinkingly the brilliant orbs stared back at him from it. He forced his gaze downward. There, too, they were.

And now he knew them—the eyes that had glittered from Suarra's bracelet of the dinosaurs! The eyes of that mingled serpent and woman she had called the Snake Mother!

They were drawing him—drawing him—

He realized that his lids had closed; yet, closing, they had not shut out the globes of vivid purple. His lethargy increased, but it was of the body, not of the mind. All his consciousness had concentrated, been gathered, into the focus of the weird, invading eyes.

Abruptly they retreated. And like line streaming out of a reel the consciousness of Graydon streamed out of him and after them—out of his body, out of the camp, through the grove and out into the land beyond!

It seemed to him that he passed swiftly over the moonlit wastes. They flashed beneath him, unrolling like panorama under racing plane. Ahead of him frowned a black barrier. It shrouded him and was gone. He had a glimpse of a wide circular valley rimmed by sky-piercing peaks; towering scarps of rock. There was the silver glint of a lake, the liquid silver of a mighty torrent pouring out of the heart of a precipice. He caught wheeling sight of carved colossi, gigantic shapes that sat bathed in the milky flood of the moon guarding each the mouth of a cavern.

A city rushed up to meet him, a city ruby roofed and opal turreted and fantastic as though built for him by jinn out of the stuff of dreams.

And then it seemed to him that he came to rest within a vast and columned hall from whose high roof fell beams of soft and dimly azure light. High arose those columns, unfolding far above into wide wondrous petaling of opal and of emerald and turquoise flecked with gold.

Before him were the eyes that in his dream—if dream it were—had drawn him to this place. And as the consciousness which was he and yet had, he knew, neither visible shape nor shadow, beheld it recoiled, filled with terror of the unknown; struggled to make its way back to the body from which it had been lured; fluttered like a serpent trapped bird; at last, like the bird, gave itself up to the serpent fascination.

For Graydon looked upon—the Snake Mother!

She lay just beyond the lip of a wide alcove set high above the pillared floor. Between her and him the azure beams fell, curtaining the great niche with a misty radiance that half-shadowed, half-revealed her.

Her face was ageless, neither young nor old; it came to him that it was free from time forever, free from the etching acid of the years. She might have been born yesterday or a million years ago. Her eyes, set wide apart, were round and luminous; they were living jewels filled with purple fires. Above them rose her forehead, wide and high and sloping sharply back. The nose was long and delicate, the nostrils dilated; the chin small and pointed.

The mouth was small, too, and heart shaped and the lips a scarlet flame.

Down her narrow childlike shoulders flowed hair that gleamed like spun silver. The shining argent strands arrow-headed into a point upon her forehead; coiled, they gave to her face that same heart shape in which her lips were molded, a heart of which the chin was the tip.

She had high little breasts, uptilted. And face and neck, shoulders and breasts were the hue of pearls suffused faintly with rose; and like rosy pearls they glistened.

Below her breasts began her—coils!

GRAYDON saw them, half buried in a nest of silken cushions—thick coils and many, circle upon circle of them, covered with great heart scales; glimmering and palely gleaming; each scale as exquisitely wrought as though by elfin jeweler; each opaline, nacreous; mother-of-pearl.

Her pointed chin was cupped in hands tiny as a baby's; like a babe's were her slender arms, their dimpled elbows resting on her topmost coil.

And on that face which was neither woman's nor serpent's but subtly both—and more, far more than either—on that ageless face sat side by side and hand in hand a spirit of wisdom that was awesome and a spirit weary beyond thought!

Graydon forgot his terror. He paid homage to her beauty; for beautiful she was though terrible—this serpent woman with hair of spun silver, her face and breasts of rosy pearls, her jeweled and shimmering coils, her eyes

of purple fire and her lips of living flame. A lesser homage he paid her wisdom. And he pitied her for her burden of weariness.

Fear of her he had none.

Instantly he knew that she had read all his thought; knew, too, that he had pleased her. The scarlet lips half parted in a smile—almost she preened herself! A slender red and pointed tongue flicked out and touched her scarlet lips. The tiny hands fell; she raised her head; up from her circled coils lifted and swayed a pearly pillar bearing that head aloft, slowly, sinuously, foot by foot until it paused twice the height of a tall man above the floor, twisting, it turned its face to the alcove.

Graydon, following the movement, saw that the alcove was tenanted. Within it was a throne—a throne that was as though carved from the heart of a colossal sapphire. It was oval, ten feet or more in height, and hollowed like a shrine. It rested upon or was set within the cupped end of a thick pillar of some substance resembling milky rock crystal. It was empty, so far as he could see, but around it elung a faint radiance. At its foot were five lesser thrones, low and with broad table-like seats. They were arranged in a semicircle. The throne at the right end of this semi-circle was red as though carved from ruby; the throne at the left was black as though cut from jet; the three central thrones were red gold.

Black throne and ruby throne and middle throne of red gold were empty. In each of the other two a figure sat, cross-legged and squatting and swathed from feet to chin in silken robes of blue and gold. Incredibly old were the faces of the pair, the stamp of lost aeons deep upon them—except their eyes.

Their eyes were young: as incredibly young as their settings were ancient. And incredibly—alive! And those vital, youthful eyes were weighing him; judging him. Judging him—with what purpose?

Floated through Graydon's mind—or whatever it was of him that hovered there in dream or in spell or in obedience to laws unknown to the science of his world—the memory of Suarra's vow. By the wisdom of the Snake Mother, and by the Five Lords and by the Lord of Lords she had sworn to save him if she could.

Why—these must be they, the two Lords she had told him still lived in Yu-Atlanchi! Certainly there was the Snake Mother. And that sapphire throne of luminous mystery must be the seat of the Lord of Lords—whatever he might be.

The fantastic city that had raced upward to enfold him was—Yu-Atlanchi!

Yu-Atlanchi! Where death—where death—

The Snake Mother had turned her head; the eyes of the two Lords no longer dwelt on his. They were looking, the three of them, beyond him. The serpent woman was speaking. He heard her voice like faint, far off music. Graydon thought that he glanced behind him.

He saw—Suarra.

So close to him she stood that he could have touched her with his hand. Slender feet bare, her cloudy hair unbound, clothed only in a single scanty robe that hid no curve nor liliesome line of her, no ornament but the bracelet of the dinosaurs; so she stood. If she saw him, she gave no sign.

And it came to him that she did not see him; did not know that he was there!

On her face was the light of a great gladness—as of one who has made a prayer and knows that prayer has been granted. He reached out a hand to touch her; make her aware of him. He felt nothing, nor did she move—

And suddenly he realized once more that he had no hands!

As he labored to understand this, he saw the Snake Mother's swaying column grow rigid, her purple eyes fix themselves upon some point, it seemed, far, far beyond the walls of that mysterious temple.

Swift as a blow they returned to him. They smote him; they hurled him away. The hall disintegrated, vanished. He had vertiginous sensation of nightmare speed, as though the earth had spun from under him and let him drop through space. The fight ended: a shock ran through him.

Dazed, he raised his lids. He lay beside the crackling camp fire. And half way between him and the tent was Sterrett charging down on him like a madman as he came.

Graydon leaped to his feet, but before he could guard himself the giant was upon him. The next moment he was down, overborne by sheer weight. The big adventurer crunched a knee into his arm and gripped his throat. Sterrett's bloodshot eyes blazed into his, his teeth were bared as though to rend him.

"Let her go, did you!" he roared. "Knocked me out and then let her go! Well, damn you, Graydon, there's where you go, too!"

Frantically Graydon tried to break that grip on his throat. His lungs labored; there was a deafening roaring in his ears; flecks of crimson began to dance across his vision. Sterrett was strangling him. Through fast dimming sight he saw two black shadows leap through the firelight glare and throw themselves on his strangler; clutch the slaying hands.

The fingers relaxed. Graydon, drawing in great sobbing breaths, staggered up. A dozen paces away stood Sterrett, still cursing him, vilely; quivering; straining to leap again upon him. Danere, arms around his knees, was hanging to him like a little terrier. Beside him was Soames, the barrel of his automatic pressed against the giant's stomach.

"Why don't you let me kill him," raved Sterrett. "Didn't I tell you the wench had enough on her to set us up the rest of our lives? Didn't I tell you she had an emerald that would have made us all rich? And there's more where that one came from. And he let her go! Let her go, the—"

Again his curses flowed.

"**N**OW look here, Sterrett," Soames's voice was deliberate. "You be quiet or I'll do for you. We ain't goin' to let this thing get by us, me and Danere. We ain't goin' to let this double-crossing whelp do us, and we ain't goin' to let you spill the beans by killing him. We've struck something big. All right, we're goin' to cash in on it. We're goin' to sit down peaceable and Mr. Graydon is goin' to tell us what happened after he put you out, what dicker he made with the girl and all of that. If he won't do it peaceable, then Mr. Graydon is goin' to have things done to him that'll make him give up. That's all. Danc', let go his legs. Sterrett, if you kick up any more trouble until I give the word I'm goin' to shoot you. From now on I boss this crowd—me and Danc'. You get me, Sterrett?"

Graydon, head once more clear, slid a cautious hand down toward his pistol holster. It was empty. Soames grinned, sardonically.

"We got it, Graydon," he said. "Yours, too, Sterrett. Fair enough. Sit down everybody."

He squatted by the fire, still keeping Sterrett covered. And after a moment the latter, grumbling, followed suit. Danere dropped beside him.

"Come over here, Mr. Graydon," snarled Soames. "Come over and cough up. What're you holdin' out on us? Did you make a date with her to meet you after you got rid of us? If so, where is it—because we'll all go together."

"Where'd you hide those gold spears?" growled Sterrett. "You never let her get away with them, that's sure."

"Shut up, Sterrett," ordered Soames. "I'm holdin' this inquest. Still—there's something in that. Was that it, Graydon? Did she give you the spears and her jewelry to let her go?"

"I've told you," answered Graydon. "Sterrett's drunken folly had put us all in jeopardy. Letting the girl go free was the first vital step toward our own safety. I thought it was the best thing to do. I still think so."

"Yes?" sneered the lank New Englander, "is that so? Well, I'll tell you, Graydon, if she'd been an Indian maybe I'd agree with you. But not when she was the kind of lady Sterrett says she was. You know damned well that if you'd been straight you'd have kept her here till Danc' and I got back. Then we could all have got together and figured what was the best to do. Hold her until her folks came along and paid up to get her back undamaged. Or give her the third degree till she gave up where all that gold and stuff she was carrying came from. That's what you would have done, Mr. Graydon, if you weren't a dirty, lyin', double-crossin' hound."

Graydon's temper awakened under the insult, his anger flared up.

"All right, Soames," he said. "I'll tell you. What I've said about freeing her for our own safety is true. But outside of that I would as soon have thought of trusting a child to a bunch of hyenas as I would of trusting that girl to you three. I let her go a damned sight more for her sake than I did for our own. Does that satisfy you?"

"Aha!" jeered Dancré. "Now I see. Here is this strange lady of so much wealth and beauty. She is too pure and good for us to behold. He tells her so and bids her fly. 'My hero,' she says, 'take all I have and give up this bad company.' 'No, no,' he tell her, 't'inking all the time if he play his cards right he get much more, and us out of the way so he need not divide, 'no, no,' he tell her. 'But long as these bad men stay here you will not be safe.' 'My hero,' say she, 'I will go and bring back my family and they shall dispose of your bad company. But you they shall reward, my hero, oui!' Aha, so that is what it was!"

"Graydon flushed; the little Frenchman's malicious travesty shot uncomfortably close. After all, Suarra's unsought promise to save him if she could might be construed as Dancré had suggested. What if he told them that he had warned her that whatever the fate in store for them he was determined to share it and that he would stand by them to the last? They would not believe him.

Soames had been watching him closely.

"By God, Danc," he said. "I guess you've hit it. He changed color. He's sold us out!"

For a moment he raised his automatic, held it on Graydon. Sterrett touched his hand.

"Don't shoot him, Soames," he begged. "Give him to me. I want to break his neck."

"No," he said, deliberately. "This is too big a thing to let slip by bein' too quick on the trigger. If your dope is right, Danc', and I guess it is, the lady was mighty grateful. All right—we ain't got her, but we have got him. As I figure it, bein' grateful, she won't want him to get killed. Well, we'll trade him for what they got that we want. Tie him up!"

He pointed the pistol at Graydon, Sterrett and Dancré went into the tent, returned with ropes from the pack saddles. Unresisting, Graydon let them bind his wrists. They pushed him over to one of the trees and sat him on the ground with his back against its bole. They passed a rope under his arms and hitched it securely around the trunk. Then they tied his feet.

"Now," said Soames, "if her gang show up in the morning, we'll let 'em see you and find out how much you're

worth. They won't rush us; there's bound to be a palaver. And if they don't come to terms, well, Graydon, the first bullet out of this gun goes through your guts. That'll give you time to see what goes on before you die!"

Graydon did not answer him. Nothing that he might say, he knew, would change them from their purpose. He closed his eyes, reviewing that strange dream of his—for dream he now believed it, thrust back among the realities of the camp. A dream borne of Suarra's words and that weird bracelet of the dinosaurs from which gleamed the purple orbs of the serpent woman.

Once or twice he opened his eyes and looked at the others. They sat beside the fire, heads close together, talking in whispers, their faces tense, and eyes aglitter with greed, feverish with the gold lust.

And after a while Graydon's head dropped forward. He slept.

CHAPTER IV

The White Llama

IT was dawn when Graydon awakened. Some one had thrown a blanket over him during the night, but he was, nevertheless, cold and stiff. He drew his legs up and down painfully, trying to start the sluggish blood. He heard the others stirring in the tent. He wondered which of them had thought of the blanket, and why he had been moved to that kindness.

Sterrett lifted the tent flap, passed by him without a word and went on to the spring. Graydon heard him drinking, thirstily. He returned and busied himself about the fire. There was an oddly furtive air about the big man. Now and then he looked at the prisoner, but with neither anger nor resentment. Rather were his glances apologetic, ingratiating. He slipped at last to the tent, listened, then trod softly over to Graydon.

"Sorry about this," he muttered. "But I can't do nothing with Soames or Dancré. Had a hard time persuading 'em even to let you have that blanket. Here take a drink of this."

He pressed a flask to Graydon's lips. He took a liberal swallow; it warmed him.

"Sh-h warned Sterrett. "Don't bear any grudge. Drunk last night. I'll help you—" He broke off, abruptly; busied himself with the burning logs. Out of the tent came Soames. He scanned Sterrett suspiciously, then strode over to Graydon.

"I'm goin' to give you one last chance, Graydon," he began without preliminary. "Come through clean with us on your dicker with the girl and we'll take you back with us and all work together and all share together. You had the edge on us yesterday and I don't know that I blame you. But it's three to one now and the plain truth is you can't get away with it. So why not be reasonable?"

"What's the use of going over all that again, Soames?" Graydon asked wearily. "I've told you everything. If you're wise, you'll let me loose, give me my guns and I'll fight for you when the trouble comes. For trouble is coming man, sure—big trouble."

"Yeh?" snarled the New Englander. "Tryin' to scare us, are you? All right—there's a nice little trick of drivin' a wedge under each of your finger nails and a-keepin' drivin' 'em in. It makes 'most anybody talk after a while. And if you didn't there's the good old fire dodge. Rollin' your feet up to it, closer and closer and closer. Yes, anybody'll talk when their toes begin to crisp up and toast."

Suddenly he bent over and sniffed at Graydon's lips.

"So that's it!" he faced Sterrett, tense, gun leveled from his hip pocket straight at the giant. "Been feedin' him liquor, have you? Been talkin' to him, have you? After

we'd settled it last night that I was to do all the talkin'. All right, that settles you, Sterrett. Dancre! Dancre! Come here, quick!" he roared.

The Frenchman came running out of the tent.

"Tie him up," Soames nodded toward Sterrett. "Another damned double-crosser in the camp. Gave him liquor. Got their heads together while we were inside. Tie him."

"But Soames," the Frenchman was hesitating, "if we have to fight the Indians it is not well to have half of us helpless, no. Perhaps Sterrett he did nothing—"

"If we have to fight, two men will do as well as three," said Soames. "I ain't goin' to let this thing slip through my fingers, Dane'. I don't think we'll have to do any fightin'. If they come, I think it's goin' to be a tradin' job. Sterrett's turnin' traitor, too. Tie him, I say."

"Well, I don't like it—" began Dancre; Soames made an impatient motion with his automatic; the little Frenchman went to the tent, returned with a coil of rope, sidled up to Sterrett.

"Put up your hands," ordered Soames. Sterrett swung them up. But in mid swing they closed on Dancre, lifted him like a doll and held him between himself and the gaunt New Englander.

"Now shoot, damn you," he cried, and bore down on Soames, meeting every move of his pistol arm with Dancre's wriggling body. Then his own right hand swept down to the Frenchman's belt, drew from the holster his automatic, leveled it over the twisting shoulder at Soames.

"Drop your gun, Yank," grinned Sterrett triumphantly. "Or shoot if you want. But before your bullet's half through Dancre here, by Heaven I'll have you drilled clean!"

There was a momentary, sinister silence. It was broken by a sudden pealing of tiny golden bells. Their chiming cleft through the murk of murder that had fallen on the camp; lightened it; dissolved it as the sunshine does a cloud. Graydon saw Soames's pistol drop from a hand turned nerveless; saw Sterrett's iron grip relax and let Dancre fall to the ground; saw the heads of Dancre and Sterrett and Soames stiffen and point to the source of that aureate music like hounds to a huddling covey.

His own eyes followed—

Through the trees, not a hundred yards away, was Suarra!

And there was no warrior host around her. She had brought with her neither avengers nor executioners. With her were but two followers. Yet even at his first glimpse it came to Graydon that if these were servants, they were two strange, strange servants indeed!

A cloak of soft green swathed the girl from neck almost to slender feet. In the misty midnight hair gleamed a coronal of emeralds set in red gold, and bandlets of gold studded with the same virescent gems circled her wrists and ankles. Behind her paced sedately a snow white llama; there was a broad golden collar around its neck from which dropped the strands of golden bells that shook out the tinkling harmonies. Its eyes were blue and between them swayed a pendant of some gem, rosy as the fruit of rubies mated to white pearls. From each of its silvery silken sides a pannier hung, woven, it seemed, from shining yellow rushes.

And at the snow-white llama's flanks were two figures, bodies covered by voluminous robes whose goods covered their faces. One was draped in darkest blue; he carried a staff of ebony and strode beside the llama sombrely, something disconcertingly mathematical in each step he took. The other was draped in yellow; he carried a staff of vermillion and he fluttered and danced beside the beast, taking little steps backward and forward; movements that

carried the weird suggestion that his robes clothed not a man but some huge bird.

Save for the tinkling of the bells there was no sound as they came on. Graydon's three jailers stared at the caravan struck immobile with amazement, incredulous, like dreaming men. Graydon himself strained at the bonds, a sick horror in his heart. Why had Suarra returned deliberately back to this peril? He had warned her; she could not be so innocent as not to know that dangers threatened her at the hands of these men. And why had she come decked out with a queen's ransom in jewels and gold? Almost it seemed that she had done this deliberately; had deliberately arrayed herself to arouse to the full the very passions from which she had most to fear!

"Dieu" It was Dancre, whispering. "The emeralds!"

"God—what a girl!" it was Sterrett, muttering; his thick nostrils distended, a red flicker in his eyes.

Only Soames said nothing, perplexity, suspicion struggling through the blank astonishment on his bleak and crafty face. Nor did he speak as the girl and her attendants halted close beside him. But the doubt, the suspicion, in his eyes grew as he scanned her and the hooded pair, then sent his gaze along the path up which they had come searching every tree, every bush. There was no sign of movement there, no sound.

"SUARRA!" cried Graydon, despairingly, "Suarra, why did you come back?"

Quietly, she stepped over to him, drew a dagger from beneath her cloak, cut the thong that bound him to the tree, slipped the blade under the cords about his wrists and ankles; freed him. He staggered to his feet.

"Was it not well for you that I did come?" she asked sweetly.

Before he could answer, Soames strode forward. And Graydon saw that he came to some decision, had resolved upon some course of action. He made a low, awkward, half mocking, half respectful bow to the girl; then spoke to Graydon.

"All right," he said, "you can stay loose—as long as you do what I want you to. The girl's back and that's the main thing. She seems to favor you quite a lot, Graydon—an' maybe that's goin' to be damned useful. I reckon that gives us a way to persuade her to talk if how happens it she turns quiet like when I get to askin' her certain things—like where those emeralds come from an' how to get there an' the likes of that. Yes, sir, and you favor her. That's useful too. I reckon you won't want to be tied up an' watch certain things happen to her, eh—" he leered at Graydon who curbed with difficulty the impulse to send his fist crashing into the cynical face. "But there's just one thing you've got to do if you want things to go along peaceable," Soames continued. "Don't do any talkin' to her when I ain't close by. Remember, I know the Aymara as well as you do. And I want to be right alongside listenin' in all the time, do you see? That's all."

He turned to Suarra, bowed once more.

"Your visit has brought great happiness, maiden," he spoke in the Aymara. "It will not be a short one, if we have our way—and I think we will have our way—" there was covert, but unmistakable menace in the phrase, yet if she noted it she gave no heed. "You are strange to us, as we must be to you. There is much for us each to learn, one of the other."

"That is true, stranger," she answered, tranquilly. "I think though that your desire to learn of me is much greater than mine to learn of you—since, as you surely know, I have had one not too pleasant lesson." She glanced at Sterrett.

"The lessons, sister," he told her bluntly, indeed brutally, "shall be pleasant or—not pleasant even as you choose to teach us or not to teach us—what we would learn."

This time there was no mistaking the covert menace in the words, nor did Suarra again let it pass. Her eyes blazed sudden wrath.

"Better not to threaten," she warned, her proud little head thrown haughtily back. "I, Suarra, am not used to threats—and if you will take my counsel you will keep them to yourself hereafter."

"Yes, is that so?" Soames took a step toward her, face grown grim and ugly; instantly Graydon thrust himself between him and the girl. There came a curious, dry chuckling from the hooded figure in yellow. Suarra started; her wrath, her hateur vanished; she became once more naive, friendly. She pushed Graydon aside.

"I was hasty," she said to Soames. "Nevertheless it is never wise to threaten unless you know the strength of what it is you menace. And remember, of me you know nothing. Yet I know all that you wish to learn. You wish to know how I came by this—and this—and this—" she touched her coronal, her bracelet, her anklets. "You wish to know if there are more of them there, and if so how you may possess yourself of as much as you can carry away. Well, you shall know all that. I have come to tell you."

At this astonishing announcement, apparently so frank and open, all the doubt and suspicion returned to Soames. Again his gaze narrowed and searched the trail up which Suarra and her caravan had come. It returned and rested on the girl; then scrutinized the two servitors who, Graydon now realized, had stood like images ever since the caravan had come to rest within the camp; motionless, and except for that one dry, admonitory chuckling, soundless.

And as he stood thus, considering, Dancre came up and gripped his arm.

"Soames," he said, and his voice and his hand were both shaking, "the baskets of the llama! They're not rushes—they're gold, pure gold, pure soft gold, woven like straw. *Dieu*, Soames, what have we struck!"

Soames's eyes glittered.

"Better go over and watch where they came up, Dan'," he answered. "I don't quite get this. It looks too cursed easy to be right. Take your rifle and squint out from the edge of the trees while I try to get down to what's what."

As though she had understood the words, Suarra struck in:

"There is nothing to fear. No harm will come to you from me. If there is any evil in store for you, you yourself shall summon it—not we. I have come to show you the way to treasure. Only that. Come with me and you shall see where jewels like these"—she touched the gems meshed in her hair—"grow like flowers in a garden. You shall see the gold come streaming forth, living, from—" she hesitated; then went on—"come streaming forth like water. You bath in that stream, drink from it if you will, carry away all that you can bear. Or if it causes you too much sorrow to leave it, why—you may stay with it forever; nay, become a part of it, even. Men of gold!"

She laughed; turned from them; walked toward the llama.

The men stared at her and at each other; on the faces of three, greed and suspicion; bewilderment on Graydon's, for beneath the mockery of those last words he had sensed the pulse of the sinister.

"It is a long journey," she faced them, one hand on the llama's head. "You are strangers here; indeed, my guests—in a sense. Therefore a little I have brought for your entertainment before we start."

She began to unbuckle the panniers. And Graydon was again aware that these two attendants of hers were

strange servants—if servants, again, they were. They made no move to help her. Silent they still stood, motionless, faces covered. In their immobility he felt something implacable, ominous, dread. A little shiver shook him.

He stepped forward to help the girl. She smiled up at him, half shyly. In the midnight depths of her eyes was a glow warmer far than friendliness; his hands leaped to touch hers.

Instantly Soames stepped between them.

"Better remember what I told you," he snapped; then ran his hand over the side of the pannier. And Graydon realized that Dancre had spoken truth. The panniers were of gold; soft gold, gold that had been shaped into willow-like withes and plaited.

"Help me," came Suarra's voice. Graydon lifted the basket and set it down before her. She slipped a hasp; bent back the soft metal withes; drew out a shimmering packet. She shook it and it floated out on the dawn wind, a cloth of silver. She let it float to the ground where it lay like a great web of gossamer spun by silver spiders.

Then from the hamper she brought forth cups of gold and deep, boat shaped golden dishes, two tall ewers whose handles were slender carved dragons, their scales made, it seemed, from molten rubies. After them small golden withed baskets. She set the silver cloth with the dishes and the cups. She opened the little baskets. In them were unfamiliar, fragrant fruits and loaves and oddly colored cakes. All these Suarra placed upon the plates. She dropped to her knees at the head of the cloth, took up one of the ewers, snapped open its lid and from it poured into the cups clear amber wine.

She raised her eyes to them; waved a white hand, graciously.

"Sit," she said. "Eat and drink."

She beckoned to Graydon; pointed to the place beside her. Silently, gaze fixed on the glittering hoard, Sterrett and Dancre and Soames squatted before the other plates. Soames thrust out a hand, took up one of these and weighed it, scattering what it held upon the ground.

"Gold," he breathed.

Sterrett laughed, crazily; raised his wine filled goblet to his lips.

"Wait!" Dancre caught his wrist. "Eat and drink, she said, eh? Eat, drink and be merry—for to-morrow we die, eh—is that it, Soames?"

The New Englander started, face once more dark with doubt.

"You think it's poisoned?" he snarled.

"May be so—maybe no," the little Frenchman shrugged. "But I think it better we say 'After you' to her."

"They are afraid. They think it is—that you have—" Graydon stumbled.

"That I have put sleep—or death in it?" Suarra smiled. "And you?" she asked.

For answer Graydon raised his cup and drank it. For a moment she contemplated him, approval in her gaze.

"Yet it is natural," she turned to Soames. "Yes, it is natural that you three should fear this, since, is it not so—it is what you would do if you were we and we were you? But you are wrong. I tell you again that you have nothing to fear from me—who come only to show you a way. I tell you again that what there is to fear as we go on that way is that which is in yourselves."

She poured wine into her own eup, drank it; broke off a bit of Sterrett's bread and ate it; took a cake from Dancre's plate and ate that, set white teeth in one of the fragrant fruits.

"ARE you satisfied?" she asked them. "Oh, be very sure that if it was my wish to bring death to you it would be in no such form as this."

For a moment Soames glared at her. Then he sprang to his feet, strode over to the hooded, watching figures and snatched aside the cowl of the blue robed one. Graydon with a cry of anger leaped up and after him—then stood, turned to stone.

For the face that Soames had unmasked was like old ivory and it was seamed with a million lines; a face stamped with unbelievable antiquity, but whose eyes were bright and as incredibly youthful as their setting was ancient.

The face of one of those two draped figures that had crouched upon the thrones in that mystic temple of his dream!

The face of one of those mysterious Lords who with that being of coiled beauty Suarra had named the Snake Mother, had listened to, and as he then thought had granted, Suarra's unknown prayer!

A dozen heart beats it may be the gaunt New Englander stared into that inscrutable, ancient face and its unwinking brilliant eyes. Then he let the hood drop and walked slowly back to the silver cloth. And as he passed him, Graydon saw that his face was white and his gaze was fixed as though he had looked into some unnamable terror. And as he threw himself down at his place and raised his wine cup to his lips, his hand was shaking.

The spell that had held Graydon relaxed. He looked at the black robed figure; it stood as before, motionless and silent. He dropped beside Suarra. Soames, hand still shaking, held out to her his empty goblet. She filled it; he drained it and she filled it again. And Graydon saw now that Sterrett's ruddy color had fled and that Dancre's lips were twitching and had grown gray.

What was it that they had seen in that seamed, ivory face that had been invisible to him? What warning? What vision of horror?

They drank thirstily of the wine. And soon it had taken effect; had banished their terror—whatever it had been. They ate hungrily of the loaves, the little cakes, the fruit. At last the plates were empty—the tall ewer, too.

"And now," Suarra arose, "it is time for us to go—if you desire still to be led to that treasure house of which I have told you."

"We're going, sister, never fear," Soames grinned half drunkenly, and lurched to his feet. "Danc', stay right here and watch things. Come on Sterrett," he slapped the giant on the back, all distrust, for the moment at least, vanished. "Come on, Graydon, let by-gones be by-gones."

Sterrett laughed vacantly, scrambled up and linked his arms in the New Englander's. Together they made their way to the tent. Dancre, rifle ready, settled down on a boulder just beyond the fire and began his watch.

Graydon lingered behind. Soames had forgotten him, for a little time at least; he meant to make the best of that time with this strange maid whose beauty and sweetness had netted heart and brain as no other woman ever had. He came close to her, so close that the subtle fragrance of her cloudy hair rocked his heart, so close that her shoulder touching his sent through him little racing, maddening flames.

"Suarra—" he began, hoarsely. Swiftly she turned and silenced him with slender fingers on his lips.

"Not now," she whispered. "You must not tell me what is in your heart—O man to whom my own heart is eager to speak. Not now—nor, it may be, ever—"there was sorrow in her eyes, longing, too; quickly she veiled them—"I promised you that I would save you—if I could. And of that vow was born another promise—"her glance sought the two silent, quiet shapes in blue and in yellow, meaningly. "So speak to me not again," she went on hurriedly, "or if you must—let it be of commonplace things, not of that which is in your heart—or mine!"

Stupidly he looked at her. What did she mean by a promise born of that she had made to him? A vow to these—Lords; to the mystery of the serpent's coils and woman's face and breasts—the Snake Mother? A vow in exchange for his life? Had they seen deeper into her heart than he and found there in very truth what he had half dreamed might be? Had she vowed to them to hold him apart from her if they would grant him protection, his comrades too—if they would have it?

Suddenly it came to him that for him, at least, the life she would save by such a barter would not be worth living.

She was packing away the golden cups and dishes. Mechanically he set about helping her. And, save for what he handled, he thought with grim humor, this was a commonplace thing enough surely to satisfy her. She accepted his aid without comment, looked at him no more. And after a while the fever in his blood cooled, his hot revolt crystallized into cold determination. For the moment he would accept the situation. He would let matters develop. His time would come. He could afford to wait.

Without a word when the last shining cup was in the pannier and the mouth of the latter closed he turned and strode to the tent to get together his duffle, pack his burro. The voices of Sterrett and Soames came to him; he hesitated; listened.

"What it was when I looked into his damned wrinkled old face I don't know," he heard Soames say. "But something came over me, Sterrett. I can't remember—only that it was like looking over the edge of the world into hell!"

"I know," Sterrett's voice was hoarse, "I felt the same way."

"Hypnotism," said Soames, "that's what it was. The Indian priests down here know how to work it. But he won't catch me again with that trick. I'll shoot. You can't hypnotize a gun, Sterrett."

"But they're not Indians, Soames," came Sterrett's voice. "They're whiter than you and me. What are they? And the girl—God—"

"What they are we'll find out, never fear," grunted the New Englander. "To hell with the girl—take her if you can get her. But I'd go through a dozen hells to get to the place where that stuff they're carryin' samples of comes from. Man—with what we could carry out on the burros and the llama and come back for—man, we could buy the world!"

"Yes—unless there's a trap somewhere," said Sterrett, dubiously.

"We've got the cards in our hands," plainly the drink was wearing off Soames, all his old confidence and cunning were returning. "Hell—what's against us? Two old men and a girl. Now I'll tell you what I think. I don't know who or what they are, but however or whatever, you can bet there ain't many of 'em. If there was, they'd be landin' on us hard. No—they're damned anxious to get us away and they're willin' to let us get out with what we can to get us away. Poor boobs—they think if they give us what we want now we'll slip right off and never come back. And as for what they are, well, I'll tell you what I think—half-breeds. The Spanish were down here; maybe they bred in with the Incas. There's probably about a handful left. They know we could wipe 'em out in no time. They want to get rid of us, quick and cheap as possible. And the three of us could wipe 'em out."

"Three of us?" asked Sterrett. "Four you mean. There's Graydon."

"Graydon don't count—the damned crook. Thought he'd sold us out, didn't he? All right—we'll fix Mr. Graydon when the time comes. Just now he's useful to us on account of the girl. She's stuck on him. But when the time comes to divide—there'll only be three of us. And

there'll only be two of us—if you do anything like you did this morning.”

“Cut that out, Soames,” growled the giant. “I told you it was the drink. I’m through with that now that we’ve seen this stuff. I’m with you to the limit. Do what you want with Graydon. But save the girl for me. I’d be willing to make a bargain with you on that—give up a part of my share.”

“Oh, hell,” drawled Soames. “We’ve been together a good many years, Bill. There’s enough and plenty for the three of us. You can have the girl for nothing.”

Little flocks of red danced before Graydon’s eyes. With his hand stretched to tear open the tent flap and grapple with these two who could talk so callously and evilly of Suarra’s disposal, he checked himself. That was no way to help her. Unarmed, what could he do against these armed adventurers? Nothing. Some way he must get back his own weapons. And the danger was not imminent—they would do nothing before they reached that place of treasure to which Suarra had promised to lead them.

There had been much of reason in Soames’s explanation of the mystery.

That vision of his—what was it after all but an illusion? He remembered the sensation that had caught him when he had first seen those brilliant purple jewels in Suarra’s bracelet; the feeling that he looked along them for great distances back to actual eyes of which the purple jewels were but prolongations. That vision of his—was it not but a dream induced by those jewels? A fantasy of the subconsciousness whipped out of it by some hypnotic quality they possessed? Science, he knew, admits that some gems hold this quality—though why they do science cannot tell. Dimly he remembered that he had once read a learned article that had tried to explain the power—something about the magnetic force in light, a force within those vibrations we call color; something about this force being taken up by the curious mechanism of rods and cones in the retina which flashes the sensations we call color along the optic nerves to the brain.

These flashes, he recalled the article had said, were actual though minute discharges of electricity. And since the optic nerves are not in reality nerves at all, but prolongations of the brains, this unknown force within the gems impinged directly upon the brain, stimulating some cells, depressing others, affecting memory and judgment, creating visions, disturbing all that secret world until the consciousness became dazzled, bewildered, unable to distinguish between reality and illusion.

SO much for his vision. That the face of the figure in blue seemed to be one of those Lords he had seen in that vision—well, was not that but another illusion?

Soames might well be right, too, he thought, in his interpretation of Suarra’s visit to the camp. If she had power behind her would she not have brought it? Was it not more reasonable to accept the New Englander’s version of the thing?

And if that were so, then Suarra was but a girl with only two old men to help her—for he had no doubt that the figure in yellow like that in blue was an old man too.

And all that meant that he, Graydon, was all of strength that Suarra could really count on to protect her.

He had spun his web of reasoning with the swiftness of a dream. When he had arrived at its last strand he stole silently back a score of paces; waited for a moment or two; then went noisily to the tent. For the first time in many hours he felt in full command of himself; thought he saw his way clear before him. Faintly he recognized that he had glossed over, set aside arbitrarily, many things. No matter—it was good to get his feet on earth again, to

brush aside all these cobwebs of mystery, to take the common sense view. It was good and it was—safer.

He thrust aside the tent flap and entered.

“Been a long while comin’,” snarled Soames, again his old, suspicious self. “Been talkin’—after what I told you?”

“Not a word,” answered Graydon cheerfully. He busied himself with his belongings. “By the way, Soames,” he said casually, “don’t you think it’s time to stop this nonsense and give me back my guns?”

Soames made no answer; went on with his hasty packing.

“Oh, all right then,” Graydon went on. “I only thought that they would come in handy when the pinch comes. But if you want me to look on while you do the scrapping—well, I don’t mind.”

“You’d better mind,” Soames did not turn around, but his voice was deadly. “You’d better mind, Graydon. If a pinch comes—we’re takin’ no chances of a bullet in our backs. That’s why you got no guns. And if the pinch does come—well, we’ll take no chances on you anyway. Do you get me?”

Graydon shrugged his shoulders. In silence the packing was completed; the tent struck; the burros loaded.

Suarra stood awaiting them at the side of the white llama. Soames walked up to her, drew from its holster his automatic, balanced it in outstretched hand.

“You know what this is?” he asked her.

“Why, yes,” she answered. “It is the death weapon of your kind.”

“Right,” said Soames. “And it deals death quickly, quicker than spears or arrows.” He raised his voice so there could be no doubt that blue cowl and yellow cowl must also hear. “Now, sister, I and these two men here,” he indicated Sterrett and Dancre, “carry these and others still more deadly. This man’s weapons we have taken from him,” he pointed to Graydon. “Your words may be clearest truth. I hope they are—for your sake and this man’s and the two who come with you—him and him—” he wagged a long finger to Graydon, at blue cowl, at yellow cowl. “Quick death! We’ll get them out of the way first. And we’ll attend to you later—as it seems best to me.”

He scanned her through slitted eyes that gleamed coldly.

“You understand me?” he asked, and grinned like a hungry wolf.

“I understand,” Suarra’s eyes and face were calm, but there was more than a touch of scorn in her golden voice. “You need fear nothing from us.”

“We don’t,” said Soames. “But you have much to fear—from us.”

Another moment he regarded her, menacingly; then shoved his pistol back into its holster.

“Go first,” he ordered. “Your two attendants behind you. And then you,” he pointed to Graydon. “We three march in the rear—with guns ready.”

Without a word Suarra swung away at the white llama’s head; behind her paced blue cowl and yellow. And a dozen paces behind them walked Graydon. Behind the file of burros strode giant Sterrett, lank Soames, little Dancre—rifles ready, eyes watchful.

And so they passed through the giant *algarrobas*; out into the oddly parklike spaces beyond.

CHAPTER V

The Thing That Fled

THEY had traveled over the savanna for perhaps an hour when Suarra abruptly turned to the left, entering the forests that covered the flanks of a great mountain. Soon the trees closed in on them. Graydon could see no trail, yet the girl went on surely, without pause. He knew there must be signs to guide her since her course

took them now to one side, now to another; once he was certain that they had almost circled. Yes, trail there must be—unless Suarra was purposely trying to confuse them to prevent them from return. He could see nothing around him but the immense tree trunks, while the thick roof of leaves shut out all sight of the sun and so hid this means of discovering direction.

Another hour went by and the way began to climb, the shade to grow denser. Deeper it became and deeper until the girl was but a flitting shadow. Blue robe he could hardly see at all, but yellow robe stood out sharply, his bird suggestion suddenly accentuated—as though he had been a monstrous yellow parrot.

Once or twice Graydon had glanced at the three men behind him. The darkness was making them more and more uneasy. They walked close together, eyes and ears obviously strained to catch first faint stirrings of ambush. And now, as the green gloom grew denser still, Soames strode forward and curtly ordered him to join Danere and Sterrett. For an instant he hesitated; read murder in the New Englander's eyes; realized the futility of resistance and dropped back. Soames pressed forward until he was close behind blue cowl and yellow. They did not turn their heads nor did the girl.

Danere motioned him in between himself and Sterrett, grinning wickedly.

"Soames has changed his plan," he whispered. "If there is trouble he shoot the old devils—quick. He keep the girl to make trade wit' her people. He keep you to make trade wit' the girl. Eh?"

Graydon did not answer. He had already realized what the maneuver meant. But a wave of jubilation swept over him. When the Frenchman had pressed close to him he had felt an automatic in his side pocket. If an attack did come, he thought, he would leap upon Danere, snatch the pistol and gain for himself at least a fighting chance. He kept as close to him as he dared without arousing suspicion.

Darker grew the woods until the figures in front of him were only a moving blue. Then swiftly the gloom began to lighten. It came to him that they had been passing through some ravine, some gorge whose unseen walls had been pressing in upon them and that had now begun to retreat.

A few minutes longer and he knew he was right. Ahead of them loomed a prodigious doorway, a cleft whose sides reached up for thousands of feet. Beyond was a flood of sunshine, dazzling. Suarra stopped at the rocky threshold with a gesture of warning; peered through; beckoned them on.

Blinking, Graydon walked through the portal. Behind and on each side towered the mountain. He looked out over a broad grass covered plain strewn with huge, isolated rocks rising from the green like menhirs of the Druids. There were no trees. The plain was dish shaped; an enormous oval as symmetrical as though it had been molded by the thumb of Cyclopean potter. Straight across it, five miles or more away, the forests began again. They clothed the base of another gigantic mountain whose walls arose perpendicularly a mile at least in air. The smooth scarps described, he saw an arc of a tremendous circle—as round as Fujiyama's sacred cone, but hundreds of times its girth.

Rushed back on Graydon the picture of that hidden circular valley with its wheeling, moon bathed colossi and uprushing city of djinns into which last night he had dreamed the purple eyes of the Snake Mother had drawn him! Had it after all been no dream, but true vision? Were these rounded precipices the outer shell of that incredible place?

Suarra's story—true?

Shaken, he glanced toward her. She stood a dozen paces away, hand on the white llama's neck and gazing intently over the plain. There was anxiety in her gaze—but there was none in the attitude of those two strange servitors of hers. As silent, as unconcerned, as detached as ever, they seemed to await the girl's next move.

And now Graydon noted that they were on a wide ledge that bordered this vast oval bowl. This shelf was a full hundred feet higher than the bottom of the valley whose sides sloped up to it like the sides of a saucer. And, again carrying out that suggestion of huge dish, the ledge jutted out like a rim. He guessed that there was a concavity under his feet, and that if one should fall over the side it would be well nigh impossible to climb back because of that overhang. The surface was about twelve feet wide, and more like road carefully leveled by human hands than work of nature. Its nearer boundary was a tree covered wall of rock; unscalable. On one side the curving bowl of the valley with its weird monoliths and the circular scarp of the mysterious mountain; on the other wooded cliffs.

There was a stirring in the undergrowth where the trees ended their abrupt descent. A goat-like animal slipped out of the covert and paused, head high, nostrils testing the air.

"Meat!" exclaimed Sterrett. His rifle cracked. The beast sank to the path, twitched and lay still. Suarra leaped from the llama's side and faced the giant, eyes blazing wrath and behind that anger, or so it seemed to Graydon, fear.

"Fool!" she cried, and stamped her foot. "You fool! Get back to the cleft. Quick! All of you."

She ran to the llama; caught it by the bridle; drove it, the burros and the four men back to the shelter of the ravine mouth.

"You—" she spoke to Soames, "if you desire to reach that gold for which you thirst, see that this man uses no more that death weapon of his while we are on this path. Nor any of you. Now stay here—and be quiet until I bid you come forth."

She did not wait for reply. She ran to the cleft's opening and Graydon followed. She paused there, scanning the distant forest edge. And once more—and with greater force than ever before—the tranquility, the inhuman immobility, the indifference of those two enigmatic servitors assailed him.

They had not moved from the path. Suarra took a step toward them, and half held out helpless, beseeching hands. They made no movement—and with a little helpless sigh she dropped her hands and resumed her scrutiny of the plain.

There flickered through Graydon a thought, a vague realization. In these two cloaked and hooded figures dwelt—power. He had not been wrong in recognizing them as the Two Lords of the luminous temple. But the power they owned would not be spent to save him or the three from any consequences of their own acts, would not be interposed between any peril that they themselves should invite.

Yes, that was it! There had been some vow—some bargain—even as Suarra had said. She had promised to save him, Graydon—if she could. She had promised the others treasure and freedom—if they could win them. Very well—the hooded pair would not interfere. But neither would they help. They were judges, watching a game. They had given Suarra permission to play that game—but left the playing of it rigidly up to her.

That nevertheless they would protect her he also believed. And with that conviction a great burden lifted from his mind. Her anxiety now he understood. It was not for herself, but for—him!

"Suarra," he whispered. She did not turn her head, but she quivered at his voice.

"Go back," she said. "Those for whom I watch have sharp eyes. Stay with the others—"

Suddenly he could have sworn that he heard the whirling beat of great wings over her head. He saw—nothing. Yet she lifted her arms in an oddly summoning gesture, spoke in words whose sounds were strange to him, all alien liquid labials and soft sibilants. Once more he heard the wing beats and then not far away but faint, so faint, a note of the elfin horn!

She dropped her arms, motioned him back to the others. From the dimness of the cleft he watched her. Slow minutes passed. Again he heard the horn note, the faint whirring as of swiftly beating pinions above her. And again could see nothing!

But as though she had received some message Suarra turned, the anxiety, the trouble gone from her face. She beckoned.

"Come out," she said. "None has heard. We can be on our way. But remember what I have said. Not a second time may you escape."

She marched on with the llama. When she reached the animal that had fallen to Sterrett's aim she paused.

"Take that," she ordered. "Throw it back among the trees as far as you can from the path."

"Hell, Soames," cried Sterrett. "Don't fall for that. It's good meat. I'll slip it in on one of the burros."

But Soames was staring at the girl.

"Afraid something 'll track us by it?" he asked. She nodded. Some of the cynic evil fled from the New Englander's face.

"She's right," he spoke curtly to Sterrett. "Pick it up and throw it away. And do as she says. I think she's goin' to play square with us. No more shootin' d'you hear?"

STERRETT picked up the little animal and hurled it viciously among the trees.

The caravan set forth along the rimlike way. Noon came and in another ravine that opened upon the strange road they snatched from saddle bags a hasty lunch. They did not waste time in unpacking the burros. There was a little brook singing in the pass and from it they refilled their canteens, then watered the animals. This time Suarra did not join them, sitting aloof with blue cowl and yellow.

By mid-afternoon they were nearing the northern end of the bowl. All through the day the circular mountain across the plain had unrolled its vast arc of cliff. And through the day Suarra's watch of its forest clothed base had never slackened. A wind had arisen, sweeping toward them from those wooded slopes, bending the tall heads of the grass so far below them.

Suddenly, deep within that wind, Graydon heard a faint, far off clamor, an eerie hissing, shrill and avid, as of some onrushing army of snakes. The girl heard it too, for she halted and stood tense, face turned toward the sounds. They came again—and louder. And now her face whitened, but her voice when she spoke was steady.

"Danger is abroad," she said. "Deadly danger for you. It may pass and—it may not. Until we know what to expect you must hide. Take your animals and tether them in the underbrush there." She pointed to the mountainside which here was broken enough for cover. "The four of you take trees and hide behind them. Tie the mouths of your animals that they may make no noise."

"So?" snarled Soames. "So here's the trap, is it? All right, sister, you know what I told you. We'll go into the trees, but—you go with us where we can keep our hands on you."

"I will go with you," she answered indifferently. "If those who come have not been summoned by the noise of that fool's death weapon"—she pointed to Sterrett—"you

can be saved. If they have been summoned by it—none can save you."

Soames glared at her, then turned abruptly.

"Danc'," he ordered, "Sterrett—get the burros in. And Graydon—you'll stay with the burros and see they make no noise. We'll be right close—with the guns—and we'll have the girl—don't forget that."

Again the wind shrilled with the hissing.

"Be quick," cried Suarra.

Swiftly they hid themselves. When trees and underbrush had closed in upon them it flashed on Graydon, crouching behind the burros, that he had not seen the two cloaked familiars of Suarra join the hurried retreat and seek the shelter of the woods. He was at the edge of the path and cautiously he parted the bushes; peered through.

The two were not upon the rim!

Simultaneously, the same thought had come to Dancere. His voice came from a near-by bole.

"Soames—where those two old devils wit' the girl go?"

"Where'd they go?" Soames repeated blankly. "Why, they came in with us, of course."

"I did not see them," persisted Dancere. "I t'ink not, Soames. If they did—then where are they?"

"You see those two fellows out on the path, Graydon?" called Soames, anxiety in his tones.

"No," answered Graydon curtly.

Soames cursed wickedly.

"So that's the game, eh?" he grunted. "It's a trap! And they've cut out and run to bring 'em here!"

He dropped into the Aymara and spoke to Suarra.

"You know where those men of yours are?" he asked menacingly.

Graydon heard her laugh and knew that she was close beside the New Englander with Dancere and Sterrett flanking her.

"They come and go as they will," she answered serenely.

"They'll come and go as I will," he snarled. "Call them."

"I call them!" again Suarra laughed. "Why, they do not my bidding. Nay—I must do theirs—"

"Don't do that, Soames!" Dancere's cry was sharp, and Graydon knew that Soames must have made some threatening movement. "If they're gone, you cannot bring them back. We have the girl. Stop, I say!"

Graydon jumped to his feet. Bullets or no bullets, he would fight for her. As he poised to leap a sudden gust of wind tore at the trees. It brought with it a burst of the weird hissing, closer, strident, in it a devilish undertone that filled him with unfamiliar nightmare terror.

Instantly came Suarra's voice.

"Down! Down—Graydon!"

Then Dancere's, quivering Graydon knew, with the same fear that had gripped him:

"Down! Soames won't hurt her. For God's sake, hide yourself, Graydon, till we know what's coming!"

Graydon turned; looked out over the plain before he sank again behind the burros. And at that moment, from the forests which at this point of the narrowing bowl were not more than half a mile away, he saw dart out a streak of vivid scarlet. It hurled itself into the grass and scuttled with incredible speed straight toward one of the monoliths that stood, black and sheer a good three quarters of the distance across the dish shaped valley and its top fifty feet or more above the green. From Graydon's own height he could see the scarlet thing's swift rush through the grasses. As he sank down it came to him that whatever it was, it must be of an amazing length to be visible so plainly at that distance. And what was it? It ran like some gigantic insect!

HE parted the bushes, peered out again. The scarlet thing had reached the monolith's base. As he watched,

it raised itself against the rock and swarmed up its side to the top. At the edge it paused, seemed to raise its head cautiously and scan the forest from which it had come.

The air was clear, and against the black background of the stone, the vividly colored body stood out. Graydon traced six long, slender legs by which it clung to the rocky surface. There was something about the body that was monstrous, strangely revolting. In its listening, reconnoitering attitude and the shape of its head was something more monstrous still, since it carried with it a vague, incredible suggestion of humanness.

Suddenly the scarlet shape slipped down the rock breast and raced with that same amazing speed through the grasses toward where Graydon watched. An instant later there burst out of the forest what at first glance he took for a pack of immense hunting dogs—then realized that whatever they might be, dogs they certainly were not. They came forward in great leaps that reminded him of the motion of kangaroos. And as they leaped they glittered in the sun with flashes of green and blue as though armored in mail made of emeralds and sapphires.

Nor did ever dogs give tongue as they did. They hissed as they ran, shrilly, stridently, the devilish undertones accentuated—a monstrous, ear piercing sibilation that drowned all other sounds and struck across the nerves with fingers of unfamiliar primeval terror.

The scarlet thing darted to right, to left, frantically; then crouched at the base of another monolith, motionless.

And now, out of the forest, burst another shape. Like the questing creatures, this glittered too but with sparkles of black as though its body was cased in polished jet. Its bulk was that of a giant draft horse, but its neck was long and reptilian. At the base of that neck, astride it, he saw plainly the figure of—a man!

A dozen leaps and it was close behind the glittering pack, now nosing and circling between the first monolith and the woods.

"The Xinli," came Suarra's voice from above him.

The Xinli? It was the name she had given the beasts of the bracelet that held in their paws the disk of the Snake Mother!

The dinosaurs!

His own burro lay close beside him. With trembling hand he reached into a saddlebag and drew out his field glasses. He focused them upon the pack. They swam mistily in the lenses, then sharpened into outline. Directly in his line of vision, in the center of the lens, was one of the creatures that had come to gaze, that stood rigidly, its side toward him, pointing like a hunting dog. The excellent glasses brought it so closely to him that he could stretch out a hand it seemed, and touch it.

And it was—a dinosaur!

Dwarfed to the size of a Great Dane dog, still there was no mistaking its breed—one of those leaping, upright-walking monstrous lizards that millions of years ago had ruled earth and without whose extinction, so science taught, man could never have arisen ages later to take possession of this planet. Graydon could see its blunt and spade shaped tail which, with its powerful, pillarlike hind legs, made the tripod upon which it squatted. Its body was nearly erect. It had two forelegs or arms, absurdly short, but muscled as powerfully as those upon which it sat. It held these half curved as though about to clutch. And at their ends were—no paws; no—but broad hands, each ending in four merciless talons, of which one thrust outward like a huge thumb and each of them armed with chisel-like claws, whose edges, he knew, were sharp as scimitars.

What he had taken for mail of sapphire and emerald were the scales of this dwarfed dinosaur. They overlapped one another like the scales upon an armadillo and it was

from their burnished blue and green surfaces and edges that the sun rays struck out the jewel glints.

The creature turned its head upon its short, bull-like neck; it seemed to stare straight at Graydon. He glimpsed little fiery red eyes set in a sloping, bony arch of narrow forehead. Its muzzle was shaped like that of a crocodile, but smaller; truncated. Its jaws were closely studded with long, white and pointed fangs. The jaws slavered.

In a split second of time the mind of Graydon took in these details. Then beside the pointing dinosaur leaped the beast of the rider. Swiftly his eyes took it in—true dinosaur this one, too, but ebon scaled, longer tailed, the hind legs more slender and its neck a cylindrical rod five times thicker than the central coil of the giant boa. His eyes flashed from it to the rider.

Instantly Graydon knew him for a man of Suarra's own race—whatever that might be. There was the same ivory whiteness of skin, the same more than classic regularity of feature. The face, like hers, was beautiful, but on it was stamped an inhuman pride and a relentless, indifferent cruelty—equally as inhuman. He wore a close fitting suit of green that clung to him like a glove. His hair was a shining golden that glamed in the sun with almost the brilliancy of the hunting dinosaur's scales. He sat upon a light saddle fastened to the neck of his incredible steed just where the shoulders met it. There were heavy reins that ran to the mouth of the snake-slender, snake-long head of the jetty dinosaur.

Graydon's glasses dropped from a nerveless hand. What manner of people were these who hunted with dinosaurs for dogs and a dinosaur for steed!

His eyes fell to the base of the monolith where had crouched the scarlet thing. It was no longer there. He caught a gleam of crimson in the high grass not a thousand feet from him where he watched. Cautiously the thing was creeping on and on toward the rim. He wondered whether those spider legs could climb it, carry it over the outjutting of the ledge? He shuddered. A deeper dread grew. Could the dinosaur pack scramble or leap over that edge in pursuit? If so—

There came a shrieking clamor like a thousand fumes out of which hissed the hate of hell. The pack had found the scent and were leaping down in a glittering green and blue wave.

As they raced, the scarlet thing itself leaped up out of the grasses not a hundred yards away.

And Graydon glared at it with a numbing, sick horror at his heart. He heard behind him an incredulous oath from Soames; heard Dancre groan with, he knew, the same horror that held him.

The scarlet thing swayed upon two long and slender legs, its head a full fifteen feet above the ground. High on these stilts of legs was its body, almost round and no larger than a child's. From its shoulders waved four arms, as long and as slender as the legs, eight feet or more in length. They were human arms—but human arms that had been stretched like rubber to thrice their normal length. The hands—or claws—were gleaming white. Body, arms, and legs were covered with a glistening, scarlet silken down.

The head was a human head!

A man's head and a man's face, brown skinned, hawk-nosed, the forehead broad and intelligent, the eyes inordinately large, unwinking and filled with soul destroying terror.

A man spider!

A man who by some infernal art had been remodeled into the mechanical semblance of the spinning Arachnidæ, without the stamp of his essential human origin having been wiped away in the process!

Only for a moment the man-spider stood thus revealed. The pack was rushing down upon it like a cloud of dragons.

It screamed, one shrill, high pitched note that wailed like the voice of ultimate agony above the hissing clamor of the pack. It hurled itself, a thunderbolt of scarlet fear, straight toward the rim.

Beneath him, Graydon heard the sounds of frantic scrambling and scratching. Two hands a full foot long, pallidly shining, shot over the rim of the ledge, gripping it with long fingers that were like blunt needles of bone, horn covered. They clutched and shot forward, behind them a length of spindling scarlet-downed arm.

It was the man-spider, drawing himself over—and the wave of dinosaurs was now almost at the spot from which it had hurled itself at the ledge!

The spell of terror upon Graydon broke.

"A gun," he gasped. "For God's sake, Soames, throw me a gun!"

A GAINST his will, his gaze swept back to those weird, clutching hands. He thought he saw a rod dart out of the air and touch them—the long blue rod he had last seen carried by Suarra's hooded attendant in blue.

Whether he saw it, whether he did not, the needle-fingered claws opened convulsively; released their hold; slid off.

Glittering pack and ebon dinosaur steed alike were hidden from him by the overhang of the shelflike road. But up from that hidden slope came a fiendish, triumphant screaming. An instant later and out into the range of his sight bounded the great black dinosaur, its golden haired rider shouting; behind it leaped the jewel scaled horde. They crossed the plain like a thunder cloud pursued by emerald and sapphire lightnings. They passed into the forest and were gone.

"That danger is over," he heard Suarra say coolly. "Come. We must go on more quickly now."

She stepped out of the tree shadows and came tranquilly to him. Soames and Danere and Sterrett, white faced and shaking, huddled close behind her. Graydon arose; managed to muster something of his old reckless air. She smiled at him, that half shy approval of him again in her eyes.

"It was just a weaver," she said gently. "We have many such. He tried to escape—or maybe Lantlu opened the door that he might try to escape, so he could hunt him. Lantlu loves to hunt with the Xinli. Or it may be that his weaving went wrong and this was his punishment. At any rate, it is fortunate that he did not gain this road, since if he had, the Xinli and Lantlu would surely have followed. And then—"

She did not end the sentence, but the shrug of her shoulders was eloquent.

"Just a weaver!" Soames broke in, hoarsely. "What do you mean? God in heaven, it had a man's head!"

"It was a man!" gasped Danere.

"No," she paid no heed to him, speaking still to Graydon. "No—it was no man. At least no man as you are. Long, long ago, it is true, his ancestors were men like you. But not he. He was just—a weaver."

She stepped out upon the path. And Graydon, following, saw waiting there, as quietly, as silently, as tranquilly as though they had not stirred since first he and his companions had fled—the blue cowed and yellow cowed familiars of Suarra. Immobile, they waited while she led forth the white llama. And as she passed Graydon she whispered to him.

"The weaver had no soul. Yu-Atlanchi fashioned him as he was. But remember him—Graydon—when you come to our journey's end!"

She took her place at the head of the little caravan. Blue cowl and yellow paced behind her. Soames touched Graydon, woke him from the stark amaze into which those last words of hers had thrown him.

"Take your old place," said Soames. "We'll follow. Later—we want to talk to you, Graydon. Maybe you can get your guns back—if you're reasonable."

Suarra turned.

"Hurry," she urged; "the sun sinks and we must go quickly. Before to-morrow's noon you shall see your garden of jewels and the living gold streaming for you to do with it—or the gold to do with you—as you yourselves shall will it."

They set forth along the rimmed trail.

The plain was silent, deserted. From the far forests came no sound. Graydon, as he walked, strove to fit together in his mind all that swift tragedy he had just beheld and what the girl had told him. A weaver she had called the scarlet thing—and soulless and no man. Once more she had warned him of the power of that hidden, mysterious Yu-Atlanchi. What was it she had told him once before of that power? That it slew souls—or changed them!

A weaver? A man-spider who was soulless but whose ancestors ages ago had been men like himself—so she had said. Did she mean that in that place she called Yu-Atlanchi dwelt those who could reshape not only that unseen dweller in our bodies that we named the soul, but change at will the house of the soul?

A weaver? A spider-man whose arms and legs were slender and long and spider-like—whose hands were like horn-covered needles of bone—whose body was like the round ball of a spider!

And she had said that the scarlet thing might have offended Lantlu by its weaving. Lantlu? The rider of the jetty dinosaur, of course.

A weaver! A picture flashed in his brain, clean cut as though his eyes beheld it. A picture of the scarlet thing in a great web, moving over it with his long and slender legs, clicking his needled hands, a human brain in a superspider's body, weaving, weaving—the very clothing that Suarra herself wore.

A vast hall of giant webs, each with its weaver—man headed, man faced, spider bodied!

Was that true picturing? Suddenly he was sure of it. Nor was it impossible. He knew that Roux, that great French scientist, had taken the eggs of frogs and by manipulating them had produced giant frogs and dwarfs, frogs with two heads and one body, frogs with one head and eight legs, three headed frogs with legs like centipedes.

And other monsters still he had molded from the very stuff of life—monstrous things that were like nothing this earth had ever seen, nightmare things that he had been forced to slay—and quickly.

If Roux had done this—and he had done it, Graydon knew—then was it not possible for greater scientists to take men and women and by similar means breed—such creatures as the scarlet thing? A man-spider?

Nature herself had given the French scientist the hint upon which his experiments had been based. Nature herself produced from time to time such abnormalities—human monsters marked outwardly and inwardly with the stigmata of the beast, the fish—even of the insect.

In man's long ascent from the speck of primeval jelly on the shallow shores of the first seas, he had worn myriad shapes. And as he moved higher from one shape to another his cousins kept them, becoming during the ages the fish he caught to-day, the horses he rode, the apes he brought from the jungles to amuse him in his cages. Even the spiders that spun in his gardens, the scorpion that scuttled from the tread of his feet, were abysmally distant blood brothers of his, sprung from the ancient Trilobite that in its turn had sprung from forms through which what was to be at last man himself had come.

Yes, had not all life on earth a common origin? Divergent now and myriad formed—man and beast, fish and serpent, lizard and bird, ant and bee and spider—all had once been in those little specks of jelly adrift in the shallow littorals of seas of an earth still warm and pulsating with the first throbs of life. *Protalbion*, he remembered Gregory of Edinburg had named it—the first stuff of life from which all life was to emerge.

Could the germs of all those shapes that he had worn in his progress to humanity be dormant in man? Waiting for some master hand of science to awaken them, and having awakened them, blend them with the shape of man?

Yes! Nature had produced such monstrosities, and unless these shapes had lain dormant and been capable of awakening, even Nature could not have accomplished it. For even Nature cannot build something out of nothing. Roux had studied that work of hers, dipped down into the crucible of birth and molded there his monsters from these dormant forms, even as had Nature.

Might it not be then that in Yu-Atlanchi dwelt those who knew so well the secrets of evolution that in the laboratories of birth they could create men and women things of any shape desired?

A loom is but a dead machine on which fingers work more or less clumsily. The spider is both machine and living artisan, spinning, weaving, more surely, more exquisitely than could any dead mechanism worked by man. Who had approached the delicacy, the beauty, of the spider's web?

Suddenly Graydon seemed to look into a whole new world of appalling grotesquerie—soulless spider men and spider women spread out over great webs and weaving with needle fingers wondrous fabrics; gigantic soulless ant men and ant women digging, burrowing, mazes of subterranean passages, conduits, *cloaca* for those who had wrought them into being; strange soulless amphibian folk busy about that lake that in his vision had circled up to him before he glimpsed the djinn city.

Phantasmagoria of humanity twinned with Nature's perfect machines while still plastic in the egg!

Came to him remembrance of Suarra's warning of what might await him at the journey's end. Had she meant to prepare him for change like this?

Shuddering, he thrust away that nightmare vision!

CHAPTER VI

The Elfin Horns

THE sun was halfway down the west when they reached the far end of the plain. Here another ravine cut through the rocky wall, and into it they filed. The trees closed in behind them, shutting out all sight of the bowl and the great circular mountain.

The new trail ran always upward, although at an almost imperceptible grade. Once, looking backward through a rift in the trees, Graydon caught a glimpse of the grassy slopes far beneath. For the rest the tree screened, tree bordered way gave no hint of what lay ahead.

It was close to dusk when they passed out of the trees once more and stood at the edge of a little moor. A barren it was indeed, more than a moor. Its floor was clean white sand and dotted with hillocks, mounds flat topped as though swept by constant brooms of wind. Upon the rounded slopes of these mounds a tall grass grew sparsely. The mounds arose about a hundred feet apart with curious regularity; almost, the fancy came to him, as though they were graves in a cemetery of giants. The little barren covered, he estimated roughly, about five acres. Around its sides the forest clustered. Near by he heard the gurgling of a brook.

Straight across the sands Suarra led them until she had reached a mound close to the center of the barren. Here she halted.

"You will camp here," she said. "Water is close by for you and your animals. You may light a fire. And sleep without fear. By dawn we must be away."

She turned and walked toward another knoll a hundred feet or more away. The white llama followed her. Behind it stalked the silent pair. Graydon had expected Soames to halt her, but he did not. Instead his eyes flashed some crafty message to Danere and Sterrett. It seemed to Graydon that they were pleased that the girl was not to share their camp; that they welcomed the distance she had put between them.

And their manner to him had changed. They were comradely once more.

"Mind taking the burros over to water?" asked Soames. "We'll get the fire going and chow ready."

He nodded and led the little beasts over to the noisy stream. Taking them back after they had drunk their fill he looked over at the mound to which Suarra had gone. There at its base stood a small square tent, glimmering in the twilight like silk and fastened to the ground at each corner by a golden peg. Tethered close to it was the white llama, placidly munching grass and grain. Its hampers of woven golden withes were gone. Nor was Suarra or the hooded men visible. They were in the little tent, he supposed, whence they had carried the precious cargo off the llama.

At his own hillock a fire was crackling and supper being prepared. Sterrett jerked a thumb over toward the little tent.

"Got it out of the saddlebags," he said. "Looked like a folded up umbrella and went up like one. Who'd ever think to find anything like that in this wilderness!"

"Lots of things I t'ink in those saddlebags we have not yet seen maybe," whispered Danere, an eager, covetous light in his eyes.

"You bet," said Soames. "And the loot we seen's enough to set us all up for life, eh, Graydon?"

"She has promised you much more," answered Graydon. There was an undercurrent of sinister meaning in the New Englander's voice that troubled him.

"Yeah," said Soames, absently. "Yeah, I guess so. But—well, let's eat."

The four sat around the burning sticks as they had done many nights before his quarrel with Sterrett. And to Graydon's perplexity they ignored that weird tragedy of the plain. They pushed it aside, passed it by, seemed to avoid it. Their talk was all of treasure—and of what they would do with it when out of these mountains and back in their own world. Piece by piece they went over the golden hoard in the white llama's packs; gloatingly they discussed Suarra's emeralds and their worth.

"Hell! With just those emeralds none of you'd have to worry!" exclaimed Sterrett.

Graydon listened to them with increasing disquiet. They were mad with the gold lust—but there was something more behind their studied avoidance of the dragging down of the scarlet thing by the dinosaurs, this constant reference to the llama's treasure, the harking back to what ease and comfort and luxury it would bring them all; something lurking unsaid in the minds of the three of them of which all this was but preliminary.

At last Soames looked at his watch.

"Nearly eight," he said, abruptly. "Dawn breaks about five. Time to talk turkey. Graydon, come up close."

Graydon obeyed, wondering. The four drew into a cluster in the shelter of the knoll. From where they crouched Suarra's tent was hidden—as they were hidden

to any watchers in that little silken pavilion looking now like a great golden moth at rest under the moonlight.

"Graydon," began the New Englander, "we've made up our minds on this thing. We're goin' to do it a little different. We're willin' and glad to let by-gones be by-gones. Hell! Here we are, four white men in a bunch of God knows what. White men ought to stick together. Ain't that so?"

Graydon nodded, waiting.

"All right," went on Soames. "Now here's the situation. I don't deny we're up against somethin' I don't know much about. We ain't equipped to go up against anything like that pack of hissin' devils we saw to-day. But—we can come back!"

Again Graydon nodded. They had decided then to go no farther. The lesson of the afternoon had not been 1st. Soames would ask Suarra to lead them out of the haunted Cordillera. As for coming back—that was another matter. He would return. But he would come back alone—seek Suarra. Since well he knew no mysterious peril either to life or soul could keep him from her. But first he must see these men safe, wipe off the debt that he believed as one man of his race to another he owed them. He was glad—but the gladness was tempered with sudden doubt. Could the game be finished thus? Would Suarra and that pair of strange old men let them—go?

Soames's next words brought him back to reality.

"There's enough stuff on that llama and the girl to set us all up right, yeah. But there's also enough to finance the greatest little expedition that ever struck the trail for treasure," he was saying. "And that's what we plan doin', Graydon. Get those hampers and all that's in 'em. Get the stuff on the girl. Beat it. An' come back. I'll bet those hissin' devils wouldn't stand up long under a couple of machine guns and some gas bombs! And when the smoke's cleared away we can lift all we want and go back and sit on the top of the world. What you say to that?"

Graydon fenced.

"How will you get it?" he asked. "How will you get away with it?"

"Easy," Soames bent his head closer. "We got it all planned. There ain't any watch bein' kept in that tent, you can bet on that. They're too sure of us. All right, if you're with us, we'll just slip quietly down there. Sterrett and Danc' they'll take care of the old devils. No shootin'. Just slip their knives into their ribs. Me and you'll attend to the girl. We won't hurt her. Just tie her up and gag her. Then we'll stow the stuff on a couple of the burros, get rid of the rest and that damned white beast and beat it quick."

"Beat it where?" asked Graydon, striving to cover the hot anger that welled up in him. He slipped a little closer to Dancre, hand alert to seize the automatic in his pocket.

"We'll get out," replied Soames, confidently. "I've been figurin' out where we are and I saw a peak to the west there both Sterrett and me recognized. Looked like pretty open forest country between us, too. Once we're there I know where we are. And travelin' light and all night we can be well on our way to it by this time to-morrow."

GRAYDON thrust out a cautious hand, touched Dancre's pocket. The automatic was still there. He would try one last appeal—to fear.

"But, Soames," he urged. "There would be pursuit. What would we do with those brutes you saw to-day on our track. Why, man, they'd be after us in no time. You can't get away with anything like that."

Instantly he realized the weakness of that argument.

"Not a bit of it," Soames grinned evilly. "That's just the point. Nobody's worryin' about that girl. Nobody

knows where she is. She was damned anxious not to be seen this afternoon. No, Graydon, I figure she slipped away from her folks to help you out. I take my hat off to you—you got her sure hooked. Nobody knows where she is, and she don't want nobody to know where she is. The only ones that might raise trouble is the two old devils. And a quick knife in their ribs'll put them out of the runnin' soon enough. Then there's only the girl. She'll be damned glad to show us the way out if by chance we do get lost again. But me and Sterrett know that peak. We'll carry her along and when we get where we know we are we'll turn her loose to go home. None the worse off, eh, boys?"

Sterrett and Dancre nodded.

Graydon seemed to consider, fighting still for time. He knew exactly what was in Soames's mind—to use him in the cold blooded murder the three had planned and, once beyond the reach of pursuit, to murder him, too. Nor would they ever allow Suarra to return to tell what they had done. She too, would be slain—after they had done as they willed with her.

"Come on, Graydon," whispered Soames impatiently. "It's a good scheme and we can work it. Are you with us? If you ain't—well—"

His knife glittered in his hand. Simultaneously, Sterrett and Dancre pressed close to him, knife too, in readiness, awaiting his answer.

Their movement had given him the one advantage he needed. He swept his hand down into the Frenchman's pocket, drew out the gun and as he did so, landed a sideways kick that caught Sterrett squarely in the groin. The giant reeled back.

But before Graydon could cover Soames, Dancre's arms were around his knees, his feet torn from beneath him.

"Suar—" Graydon cried before he was down. At least his shout might waken and warn her. The cry was choked in midutterance. Soames's bony hand was at his throat. Down they crashed together.

Graydon reached up, tried to break the strangling clutch. It gave a little, enough to let him gasp in one breath. Instantly he dropped his hold on the New Englander's wrists, hooked the fingers of one hand in the corner of his mouth, pulling with all his strength. There was a sputtering curse from Soames and his hands let go. Graydon tried to spring to his feet, but one arm of the gaunt man slipped over the back of his head held his neck in the vise of bent elbow against his shoulder.

"Knife him, Danc'," growled Soames.

Graydon suddenly twisted, bringing the New Englander on top of him. He was only in time, for as he did so he saw Dancre strike, the blade barely missing Soames. The latter locked his legs around his, tried to jerk him over in range of the little Frenchman. Graydon sank his teeth in the shoulder so close to him. Soames roared with pain and wrath; threshed and rolled, trying to shake off the agonizing grip. Around them danced Dancre, awaiting a chance to thrust.

There came a bellow from Sterrett.

"The llama! It's running away! The llama!"

Involuntarily, Graydon loosed his jaws. Soames sprang to his feet. Graydon followed on the instant, shoulder up to meet the blow he expected from Dancre.

"Look, Soames, look!" the little Frenchman was pointing. "They have put the hampers back and turned him loose. There he goes—wit' the gold—wit' the jewels!"

Graydon followed the pointing finger. The moon had gathered strength and under its flood the white sands had turned into a silver lake in which the tufted hillocks stood up like tiny islands. Golden hampers on its sides, the llama was flitting across that lake of silver a hundred paces

away and headed, apparently, for the trail along which they had come.

"Stop it!" shouted Soames, all else forgotten. "After it, Sterrett! That way, Danc! I'll head it off!"

They raced out over the shining barren. The llama changed its pace; trotted leisurely to one of the mounds and bounded up to its top.

"Close in! We've got it now," he heard Soames cry. The three ran to the hillock on which the white beast stood looking calmly around. They swarmed up the mound from three sides. Soames and Sterrett he could see; Danc was hidden by the slope.

As their feet touched the sparse grass a mellow sound rang out, one of those elfin horns Graydon had heard chorusing so joyously about Suarra that first day. It was answered by others, close, all about. Again the single note. And then the answering chorus swirled toward the hillock of the llama, hovered over it and darted like a shower of winged sounds upon it.

He saw Sterrett stagger as though under some swift shock; whirl knotted arms around him as though to ward off attack!

A moment the giant stood thus, flailing with his arms. Then he cast himself to the ground and rolled down to the sands. Instantly the notes of the elfin horns seemed to swarm away from him, to concentrate around Soames. He had staggered, too, under the unseen attack. But he had thrown himself face downward on the slope of the mound and was doggedly crawling to its top. He held one arm shielding his face.

But shielding against what?

All that Graydon could see was the hillock top, and on it the llama bathed in the moonlight, the giant prone at the foot of the mound and Soames now nearly at its crest. And the horn sounds were ringing, scores upon scores of them, like the horns of a fairy hunt. But what it was that made those sounds he could not see. They were not visible; they cast no shadow.

YET once he thought he heard a whirring as of hundreds of feathery wings.

Soames had reached the edge of the mound's flat summit. The llama bent its head, contemplating him. Then as he scrambled over the edge, thrust out a hand to grasp its bridle, it flicked about, sprang to the opposite side and leaped down to the sands.

And all that time the clamor of the elfin horns about Soames had never stilled. Graydon saw him wince, strike, out, bend his head and guard his eyes as though from a shower of blows. Still he could see nothing. Whatever that attack of the invisible, it did not daunt the New Englander. He sprang across the mound and slid down its side close behind the llama. As he touched the ground Sterrett arose slowly to his feet. The giant stood swaying, half drunkenly, dazed.

The horn notes ceased, abruptly, as though they had been candlelights blown out by a sudden blast.

Danc came running around the slope of the hillock. The three stood for a second or two, arguing, gesticulating. And Graydon saw that their shirts were ragged and torn and, as Soames shifted and the moonlight fell upon him, that his face was streaked with blood.

The llama was walking leisurely across the sands, as slowly as though it were tempting them to further pursuit. Strange, too, he thought, how its shape seemed now to stand forth sharply and now to fade almost to a ghostly tenuity. And when it reappeared it was as though the moonbeams thickened, whirled and wove swiftly and spun it from themselves. The llama faded—and then grew again

on the silvery warp and woof of the rays like a pattern on an enchanted loom.

Sterrett's hand swept down to his belt. Before he could cover the white beast with the automatic Soames caught his wrist. The New Englander spoke fiercely, wrathfully. Graydon knew that he was warning the giant of the danger of the pistol crack; urging silence.

Then the three scattered, Danc and Sterrett to the left and right to flank the llama, Soames approaching it with what speed he might without startling it into a run. As he neared it, the animal broke into a gentle lope, heading for another hillock, and as before, it bounded up through the sparse grass to the top. The three pursued, but as their feet touched the base of the mound once more the mellow horn sounded—menacingly, mockingly. They hesitated. And then Sterrett, breaking from Soames's control, lifted his pistol and fired. The silver llama fell.

"The fool! the damned fool!" groaned Graydon.

The stunned silence that had followed on the hills of the pistol shot was broken by a hurricane of elfin horns. They swept down upon the three like a tempest. Danc shrieked and ran toward the camp fire, beating the air wildly as he came. Halfway he fell, writhed and lay still. And Soames and the giant—they, too, were buffeting the air with great blows, ducking dodging. The elfin horns were now a ringing, raging tumult—death in their notes.

Sterrett dropped to his knees, arose and lurched away. He fell again close to Danc's body, covered his head with a last despairing gesture and lay—as still as the little Frenchman. And now Soames went down fighting to the last.

There on the sands lay the three of them, motionless, struck down by the invisible!

Graydon shook himself into action; leaped forward. He felt a touch upon his shoulder; a tingling numbness ran through every muscle. With difficulty he turned his head. Beside him was the old man in the blue robe, and it had been the touch of his staff that had sent the paralysis through Graydon. The picture of the clutching talons of the spider-man upon the edge of the rimmed road flashed before him. That same rod had then, as he had thought, sent the weird weaver to its death.

Simultaneously, as though at some command, the clamor of the elfin horns lifted from the sands, swirled upward and hung high in air—whimpering, whining, protesting.

He felt a soft hand close around his wrist. Suarra's hand. Again he forced his reluctant head to turn. She was at his right—and pointing.

On the top of the hillock the white llama was struggling to its feet. A band of crimson ran across its silvery flank, the mark of Sterrett's bullet. The animal swayed for a moment, then limped down the hill.

As it passed Soames it nosed him. The New Englander's head lifted. He tried to rise; fell back. Then with eyes fastened upon the golden panniers he squirmed up on hands and knees and began to crawl on the white llama's tracks.

The beast went slowly, stiffly. It came to Sterrett's body and paused again. And Sterrett's massive head lifted, and he tried to rise, and, failing even as had Soames, began like him, to crawl behind the animal.

The white llama passed Danc. He stirred and moved and followed it on knees and hands.

Over the moon soaked sands, back to the camp they trailed—the limping llama, with the blood dripping drop by drop from its wounded side. Behind it three crawling men, their haggard, burning eyes riveted upon the golden withed panniers, three men who crawled, gasping like fish drawn up to shore. Three broken men, from whose drawn faces glared that soul of greed which was all that gave them strength to drag their bodies over the sands.

CHAPTER VII.

"Come Back—Graydon!"

TWO Hama and crawling men had reached the camp. The elfin horn notes were still. Graydon's muscles suddenly relaxed; power of movement returned to him.

With a little cry of pity Suarra ran to the white llama's side; caressed it, strove to stanch its blood.

Graydon bent down over the three men. They had collapsed as they had come within the circle of the camp fire. They lay now, huddled, breathing heavily, eyes fast closed. Their clothes had been ripped to ribbons.

And over all their faces, their breasts, their bodies, were scores of small punctures, not deep, their edges clean cut, as though they had been pecked out. Some were still bleeding; in others the blood had dried.

He ran to the rushing brook. Suarra was beside her tent, the llama's head in her arms. He stopped, unbuckled the panniers; let them slip away; probed the animals wound. The bullet had plowed through the upper left flank without touching the bone, and had come out. He went back to his own camp, drew forth from his bags some medical supplies, returned and bathed and dressed the wound as best he could. He did it all silently, and Suarra was silent, too.

Her eyes were eloquent enough.

This finished, he went again to the other camp. The three men were lying as he left them. They seemed to be in a stupor. He washed their faces of the blood, bathed their stained bodies. He spread blankets and dragged the three up on them. They did not awaken. He wondered at their sleep—or was it coma?

The strange punctures were bad enough, of course, yet it did not seem to him that these could account for the condition of the men. Certainly they had not lost enough blood to cause unconsciousness. Nor had any arteries been opened, nor was one of the wounds deep enough to have disturbed any vital organ.

He gave up conjecturing, wearily. After all, what was it but one more of the mysteries among which he had been moving. And he had done all he could for the three of them.

Graydon walked away from the fire, threw himself down on the edge of the white sands. There was a foreboding upon him, a sense of doom.

And as he sat there, fighting against the blackness gathering around his spirit, he heard light footsteps and Suarra sank beside him. Her cloudy hair caressed his cheek, her rounded shoulder touched his own. His hand dropped upon hers, covering it. And after a shy moment her fingers moved, then interlaced with his.

"It is the last night—Graydon," she whispered, tremulously. "The last night! And so—they—have let me talk with you a while."

"No!" he caught her to him—fiercely. "There is nothing that can keep me from you now, Suarra, except—death."

"Yes," she said, and thrust him gently away. "Yes—it is the last night. There was a promise—Graydon. A promise that I made. I said that I would save you if I could. I asked the Two Lords. They were amused. They told me that if you could conquer the Face you would be allowed to go. I told them that you would conquer it. And I promised them that after that you would go. And they were more amused, asking me what manner of man you were who had made me believe you could conquer the Face."

"The Face?" questioned Graydon.

"The great Face," she said. "The Face in the Abyss.

But of that I may say no more. You must—meet it."

"And these men too?" he asked. "The men who lie there?"

"They are already dead," she answered, indifferently. "Dead—and worse. They are already eaten!"

"Eaten!" he cried incredulously.

"Eaten," she replied. "Eaten—body and soul!"

For a moment she was silent.

"I do not think," she began again. "I did not really think—that even you could conquer the Face. So I went to the Snake Mother—and she, too, laughed. But at the end, as woman to woman—since, after all she *is* woman—she promised me to aid you. And then I knew you would be saved, since the Snake Mother far excels the Two Lords in craft and guile. And she promised me—as woman to woman. The Two Lords know nothing of that," she added naively.

Of this, Graydon, remembering the youthful eyes in the old, old faces that had weighed him in the temple of the shifting rays, had his doubts.

"So," she said, "was the bargain made. And so its terms must be fulfilled. You shall escape the Face—Graydon. But you must go."

To that he answered nothing. And after another silence she spoke again, wistfully:

"Is there any maid who loves you—or whom you love—in your own land, Graydon?"

"There is none, Suarra," he answered.

"I believe you," she said simply. "And I would go away with you—if I might. But—they—would not allow it. And if I tried—they would slay you. Yes, even if we should escape—they would slay you and bring me back. So it cannot be."

He thrilled to that, innocently self-revelant as it was.

"I am weary of Yu-Atlanchi," she went on somberly. "Yes I am weary of its ancient wisdom and of its treasures and its people who are eternal—eternal at least as the world. I am one of them—and yet I long to go out into the new world—the world where there are babes, and many of them, and the laughter of children, and where life streams passionately, strong and shouting and swiftly—even though it is through the opened doors of Death that it flows. In Yu-Atlanchi those doors are closed—except to those who choose to open them. And life is a still stream, without movement. And there are few babes—and of the laughter of children—little."

"What are your people, Suarra?" he asked.

"The ancient people," she told him. "The most ancient. Ages upon ages ago they came down from the north where they had dwelt for other ages still. They were driven away by the great cold. One day the earth rocked and swung. It was then the great cold came down and the darkness began to freeze. Their cities, so the legends run, are hidden now under mountains of ice. They journeyed south in their ships, bearing with them the Serpent people who had taught them most of their wisdom—and the Snake Mother is the last daughter of that people. They came to rest here. At that time the sea was close and the mountains had not yet been born. They found here hordes of Xinli. They were larger, far larger than now. My people subdued them and tamed and bred them for their uses. And here for another age they practiced their arts and their wisdom and learned more.

"Then there were great earth shakings and the mountains began to lift. Although all their wisdom was not great enough to keep the mountains from being born, it could control their growth around that ancient city, and its plain that were Yu-Atlanchi. Slowly, steadily through another age the mountains arose. Until at last they girdled Yu-Atlanchi like a vast wall—a wall that could never be scaled. Nor did my people care; indeed, it gladdened

them, since by then they had closed the doors of death and cared no more to go into the outer world. And so they have dwelt—for other ages more."

Again she was silent, musing. Graydon struggled against his incredulity. A people who had conquered death? A people so old that their birthplace was buried deep beneath eternal ice? And yet, as to the last—why not? Did not science teach that the frozen poles had once basked beneath a tropical sun? Expeditions had found at both of them the fossil forms of gigantic palms, strange animals, a flora and fauna that could only have lived under tropical conditions.

And did not science believe that long, long ago the earth had tipped and that thus the frozen poles had come to be?

An inexplicable irritation filled him—instinctive revolt of the young against the very old.

"If your people are so wise," he questioned, "why do they not come forth and rule this world?"

"But why should they?" she asked in turn. "They have nothing more to learn. If they came forth what could they do but build the rest of the earth into likeness of that part in which they dwell? What use in that, Graydon? None. So they let the years stream by while they dream—the most of them. For they have conquered dream. Through dream they create their own worlds; do therein as they will; live life upon life as they will it. In their dreams they shape world upon world upon world—and each of their worlds is a real world to them. And so they let the years stream by while they live in dream! Why should they go out into this one world when they can create myriads of their own at will?"

Again she was silent.

"But they are barren—the dream makers," she whispered. "Barren! That is why there are few babes and little laughter of children in Yu-Atlanchi. Why should they mate with their kind—these women and men who have lived so long that they have grown weary of all their kind can give them? Why should they mate with their kind when they can create new lovers in dream, new loves and hates! Yea, new emotions, and forms utterly unknown to earth, each as he or she may will. And so they are—barren. Not alone the doors of death, but the doors of life are closed to them—the dream makers!"

"But you—" he began.

"I?" She turned a wistful face to him. "Did I not say that when they closed the doors of death the doors of life closed, too. For these are not really two, but only the two sides of the one door. Some there are, always who elect to keep that door open, to live the life that is their own, to have no dealing with—dreams. My father and mother were of these. They took the hazard of death that they might love—"

"Ancient arts—ancient wisdom," she went on. "Wisdom that perhaps you have rediscovered and call new. Wisdom you yet may gain. Wisdom that may never be yours—and thank whatever gods you worship that you have not; pray to them that you never may have."

"Such wisdom as shaped the—weaver?" he asked.

"That! He was child's play," she answered. "A useful toy. There are far, far stranger things than the weaver in Yu-Atlanchi, Graydon."

"Suarra," he asked abruptly. "Why do you want to save me?"

A moment she hesitated; then:

"Because you make me feel as I have never felt before!" she whispered slowly. "Because you make me happy—because you make me sorrowful. When I think of you it is like warm wine in my veins. I want both to sing—and to weep. I want your touch—to be close to you. When you go—the world will be darkened—life will be drab."

"Suarra!" he cried—and drew her, unresisting now, to him. His lips sought hers and her lips clung to his. A

flame leaped through him. She quivered in his arms; was still.

"I will come back," he whispered. "I will come back, Suarra!"

"Come!" she sobbed. "Come back—Graydon!"

She thrust him from her—leaped to her feet.

"No! No!" she cried. "No—Graydon. I am wicked! No—it would be death for you!"

"As God lives, Suarra," he said, "I will come back to you!"

She trembled; leaned forward, pressed her lips to his, slipped through his arms and ran to the silken pavilion. For an instant she paused there—stretched wistful arms to him; entered and was hidden within its folds.

There seemed to come to him, faintly, heard only by heart—

"Come back! Come back to me!"

He threw himself down where their hands had clasped—where their lips had met. Hour after hour he lay there—thinking, thinking. His head dropped forward at last.

He carried her into his dreams.

CHAPTER VIII.

The Face in the Abyss

THE white sands of the barren were wan in the first gleaming of the dawn when Graydon awakened. He arose with the thought of Suarra warm around his heart. Chilling that warmth, swift upon him like a pall fell that bleak consciousness of doom against which he had struggled before he slept; and bleaker, heavier now; not to be denied.

A wind was sweeping down from the heights. Beneath it he shivered. He walked to the hidden brook; doffed clothing; dipped beneath its icy flow. Strength poured back into him at the touch of the chill current.

Returning, he saw Suarra, less than half clad, slipping out of the silken tent. Clearly, she too, was bound for the brook. He waved a hand. She smiled; then long silken lashes covered the midnight eyes; rose-pearl grew her face, her throat, her breasts. She slipped back behind the silken folds.

He turned his head from her; passed on to the camp.

He looked down upon the three—gaunt Soames, little Dancre, giant Sterrett. He stooped and plucked from Soames's belt an automatic—his own. He satisfied himself that it was properly loaded, and thrust it into his pocket. Under Soames's left arm pit was another. He took it out and put it in the holster from which he had withdrawn his. He slipped into Sterrett's a new magazine of cartridges. Danere's gun was ready for use.

"They'll have their chance, anyway," he said to himself.

He stood over them for a moment; scanned them. The scores of tiny punctures had closed. Their breathing was normal. They seemed to be asleep. And yet—they looked like dead men. Like dead men, livid and wan and bloodless as the pallid sands beneath the growing dawn.

Graydon shuddered; turned his back upon them.

He made coffee; threw together a breakfast; went back to rouse the three. He found Soames sitting up, looking around him, dazedly.

"Come get something to eat, Soames," he said, and gently, for there was a helplessness about the gaunt man that roused his pity—black hearted even as the New Englander had shown himself. Soames looked at him, blankly; then stumbled up and stood staring, as though waiting further command. Graydon leaned down and shook Sterrett by the shoulder. The giant mumbled, opened dull eyes; lurched to his feet. Danere awakened, whimpering.

As they stood before him—gaunt man, little man, giant

—a wonder, a fearful wonder, seized him. For these were not the men he had known. No! What was it that had changed these men so, sapped the life from them until they seemed, even as Suarra had said, already dead?

A verse from the Rime of the Ancient Mariner rang in his ears—

"They groaned, they stirred, they all uprose,
Nor spake, nor moved their eyes;
It had been strange, even in a dream,
To have seen those dead men rise."

Shuddering again, he lead the way to the fire. They followed him, stiffly, mechanically, like automatons. And like automatons they took the steaming coffee from him and drank it; the food and swallowed it. Their eyes, blank, devoid of all expression, followed his every movement.

Graydon studied them, the fear filled wonder growing. They seemed to hear nothing—save for the recognition of himself—to be cut off from all the world. Suddenly he became conscious of others near him; turned his head and saw close behind him Suarra and the hooded pair. The eyes of Soames, of Sterrett and of Dancre turned with his own. And now he knew that not even memory had been left them! Blankly, with no recognition—unseeing—they stared at Suarra.

"It is time to start, Graydon," she said softly, her own eyes averted from their dead gaze. "We leave the llama here. It cannot walk. Take with you only your own animal, your weapons and what belongs to you. The other animals will stay here."

He chilled, for under her words he read both sentence of death and of banishment. Death of all of them perhaps—banishment for him even if he escaped death. In his face she read his heart, accurately; tried to soften his sorrow.

"They may escape," she continued, hastily. "And if they do, the animals will be here awaiting them. And it is well for you to have your own with you, in case—in case—"

She faltered. He shook his head.

"No use, Suarra," he smiled. "I understand."

"Oh, trust me, trust me," she half sobbed. "Do as I say, Graydon."

He said no more. He unhobbled his burro; fixed the saddlebags; took his own rifle and strapped it to them. He picked up the rifles of the others and put them in their hands. They took them, as mechanically as they had the coffee and the food.

Now blue cowl and yellow swung into the lead, Suarra at their heels.

"Come on, Soames," he said. "Come, Sterrett. It's time to start, Dancre."

Obediently they swung upon the trail, marching side by side—gaunt man at left, giant in the center, little man at right. Like marionettes they marched, obediently, unquestioning, without word. If they knew the llama and its treasures were no longer with them, they gave no sign. If they knew Graydon again carried his guns, they gave no sign either.

Another line of the "Rime" echoed in his memory—

"They raised their limbs like lifeless tools—"

Graydon swung in behind them, the patient burro trotting at his side.

They crossed the white sands, entering a broad way stretching through close growing, enormous trees, as though it had once been a road of stone upon whose long deserted surface the leaves had rotted for centuries; upon which turf had formed, but in which no trees had been able to get root hold. And as they went on, he had evidence that it had been actually such a road, for where there had been wash-

outs the faces of gigantic cut and squared granite blocks were exposed.

For an hour they passed along this ancient buried trail. They emerged from it, abruptly, out upon a broad platform of bare rock. Before them were the walls of a split mountain. Its precipices towered thousands of feet. Between them, like a titanic sword cut, was a rift, a prodigious cleavage which widened as it reached upward as though each side had shrunk away from the splitting blade as it had struck downward. The platform was the threshold of this rift. Fifty feet wide from edge to edge it ran. At each edge stood a small, conical shaped building—temple or guard house—whose crumbling stones were covered with a gray lichen so ancient looking that it might have been withered old Time's own flower.

The cowed figures neither turned nor stopped. They crossed the threshold between the ruined cones; behind them Suarra; and after her, never hesitating, the stiffly marching three. Then over it went Graydon and the burro.

The way led downward at an angle barely saved from difficult steepness. No trees, no vegetation of any kind, could he see—unless the ancient, gray and dry lichen that covered the road and whispered under their feet could be called vegetation. But it gave resistance, that lichen; made the descent easier. It covered the straight rock walls that arose on each side.

The gorge was dark, as he had expected. The light that fell through its rim thousands of feet overhead was faint. But the gray lichens seemed to take it up and diffuse it. It was no darker than an early northern twilight. Every object was plainly visible.

Down they went and ever down; for half an hour; an hour. Always straight ahead the road stretched, never varying in its width and growing no darker, even the gray lichens lightened it. He estimated its drop was about fifteen feet in the hundred. He looked back and upward along its narrowing vista. They must be, he thought, half a mile or more below the level of the rift threshold.

The road angled. A breast of rock jutted abruptly out of the cliff, stretching from side to side like a barrier. The new road was narrower, barely wide enough for the three marionettes in front to walk on side by side. As they wheeled into it Graydon again felt a pang of pity. They were like doomed men marching to execution; hopeless; helpless and—drugged. Nay—they were men who had once been slain and drawn inexorably on to a second death!

Never speaking, never turning, with mechanical swing of feet, rifles held slack in limp arms, their march was a *grotesquerie* tinged with horror.

The new road was darker than the old. He had an uneasy feeling that the rocks were closing high over his head; that what they were entering was a tunnel. The gray lichens rapidly dwindled on walls and underfoot. As they dwindled, so did the light.

At last the gray lichens ceased to be. He moved through a half darkness in which he could barely see, save as shadows, those who went before.

AND now he was sure that the rocks had closed overhead, burying them. He fought against a choking oppression that came with the knowledge.

And yet—it was not so dark, after all. Strange, he thought, strange that there should be light at all in this covered way—and stranger still was that light itself. It seemed to be in the air—to be of the air. It came neither from walls nor roof. It seemed to filter in, creeping, along the tunnel from some source far ahead. A light that was as though it came from radiant atoms, infinitely small, that shed their rays as they floated slowly by.

Thicker grew these luminous atoms whose radiance only, and not their bodies, could be perceived by the eye. Lighter and lighter grew the way.

Again, and as abruptly as before, it turned.

They stood within a cavern that was like a great square auditorium to some gigantic stage; the interior of a cube of rock whose four sides, whose roof a hundred feet overhead, and whose floor were smooth and straight as though trued by giant spirit level and by plane.

And at his right dropped a vast curtain—a curtain of solid rock lifted a foot above the floor and drawn aside at the far end for a quarter of its sweep. From beneath it and from the side, streamed the radiant atoms whose slow drift down the tunnel had filled it with its ever increasing luminosity.

They streamed from beneath it and around the side, swiftly now, like countless swarms of fireflies, each carrying a lamp of diamond light.

"There"—Suarra pointed to the rocky curtain's edge—"there lies your way. Beyond it is that place I promised I would show you—the place where the jewels grow like fruit in a garden and the living gold flows forth. Here we will await you. Now go."

Long Graydon looked at that curtain and at the streaming radiant atoms pouring from beyond it. Gaunt man, little man, giant man stood, beside him, soulless faces staring at him—awaiting his command, his movement.

In the hooded pair he sensed a cynical amusement—in yellow cowl, at least. For blue cowl seemed but to wait—as though—as though even now he knew what the issue must be. Were they baiting him, he wondered; playing him for their amusement? What would happen if he were to refuse to go farther; refuse to walk around the edge of that lifted curtain; summon the three and march them back to the little camp in the barren? Would they go? Would they be allowed to go?

He looked at Suarra. In her eyes of midnight velvet was sorrow, a sorrow unutterable; despair and agony—and love!

Whatever moved that pair she called the Two Lords—in her, at least, was no cynical gaming with human souls. And he remembered her promise—that he could look upon the Face and conquer it.

Well, he would not retreat now, even if they would let him. He would accept no largess at the hands of this pair who, or so it seemed to him, looked upon her as a child who must be taught what futile thing it was that she had picked for chosen toy. He would not shame himself—nor her.

"Wait here," he spoke to the three staring ones. "Wait here—do you understand Soames—Dancro—Sterrett! Do not move! Wait here until I come back."

They only stared on at him; unanswering either with tongue or face.

"Stay here!" he repeated sharply.

He walked up to the hooded pair.

"To hell with you!" he said, clearly and as coldly as he felt they themselves might speak were they to open those silent lips of theirs. Do you understand that? I said to hell with you!"

They did not move. He caught Suarra in his arms; kissed her; suddenly reckless of them. He felt her lips clinging to his.

"Remember!" he whispered. "I will come back to you!"

He strode over to the curtain's edge, swinging his automatic as he went. He strode past the edge and full into the rush of the radiance. For perhaps a dozen heart beats he stood there, motionless, turned to stone, blank incredulity stamped deep upon his face. And then the revolver dropped from nerveless hand; clattered upon floor of stone.

For Graydon looked into a vast cavern filled with the diamonded atoms, throbbing with a dazzling light that yet was crystalline clear. The cavern was like a gigantic hol-

low globe that had been cut in two, and one half cast away. It was from its curving walls that the luminosity streamed, and these walls were jetty black and polished like mirrors, and the rays that issued from them seemed to come from infinite depths within them, darting through them with prodigious speed—like rays shot up through inconceivable depths of black water, beneath which in some unknown firmament, blazed a sun of diamond incandescence.

And out of these curving walls, hanging to them like the grapes of precious jewels in the enchanted vineyards of the Paradise of El-Shiraz, like flowers in a garden of the King of the Djinn, grew clustered gems!

Great crystals, *cabochon* and edged, globular and angled, alive under that jubilant light with the very soul of fire that is the lure of jewels. Rubies that glowed with every rubrous tint from that clear scarlet that is sunlight streaming through the finger tips of delicate maids to deepest sullen reds of bruised hearts; sapphires that shone with blues as rare as that beneath the bluebird's wings and blues as deep as those which darken beneath the creamy crest of the Gulf Stream's crisping waves; huge emeralds that gleamed now with the peacock verdancies of tropic shallows, and now were green as the depths of a jungle glade; diamonds that glittered with irised fires or shot forth showers of rainbowed rays; great burning opals; gems burning with amethystine flames; unknown jewels whose unfamiliar beauty checked the heart with wonder.

BUT it was not the clustered jewels within this chamber of radiance that had released the grasp of his hand upon the automatic; turned him into stone.

It was—the Face!

From where he stood a flight of Cyclopean steps ran down a hundred feet or more into the heart of the cavern. At their left was the semiglobe of gemmed and glittering rock. At their right was—space!

An abyss, whose other side he could not see, but which fell sheer away from the stairway in bottomless depth upon depth.

The Face looked at him from the far side of this cavern. Its eyes were level with his. Bodiless, its chin rested upon the floor a little beyond the last monolithic step. It was carved out of the same black rock as the walls, but within it was no faintest sparkle of the darting luminences.

It was man's face and devil's face in one; Luciferian; arrogant; ruthless. Colossal, thirty yards or more in width from ear to ear, it bent a little over the abyss, as though listening. Upon the broad brow power was throned, an evil and imperial power—power that could have been godlike in beneficence had it so willed, but which had chosen instead the lot of Satan. The nose was harpy curved, vulture bridged and cruel. Merciless was the huge mouth, the lips full and lecherous; the corners cynically drooping.

Upon all its carved features was stamped the very secret soul of humanity's insatiable, eternal hunger for gold. Greed and avarice were graven there—and spendthrift recklessness and callous waste. It was the golden lust given voice of stone. It promised, it lured, it threatened, it cajoled. And it—summoned!

He looked into the eyes of the Face, a hundred feet above the chin. They were made of pale blue crystals, cold as the glint of the Polar ice. With them was centered all the Face's demoniac strength.

And as Graydon glared into their chill depths swift visions passed from them to his own. Ravishing of cities and looting of ships; men drunk with greed wrestling great golden nuggets from the breast of earth; men crouching like spiders in the hearts of shining yellow webs and gloating over hordes of golden flies.

He heard the shouts of loot crazed legions sacking golden capitol; the shouting of all Argonatus since first gold and men were born. And he thrilled to their clamor; answered it with shouting of his own!

Poured into him from the cold eyes other visions—visions of what gold, gold without end, could do for him; flaming lures of power over men and nations, power limitless and ruthless as that which sat upon the Face's own brow—fair women—earthly Paradises—Fata Morganas of the senses.

There was fire in his blood, a Satanic ecstasy, a flaming recklessness.

Why—the face was not of stone! The eyes were not cold jewels!

The face was living!

And it was promising him this world—if he would but come to it!

He took a step down the stairway.

There came to him Suarra's heartbroken cry!

It checked him.

He looked again at the colossal Face.

And now he saw that all the darting luminous atoms from the curving walls were concentrated upon it. It threw them back, into the chamber and under and past the curtain of rock, and out into the abyss. And that there was a great circle of gold around the Face's brow—a wide, deep crown almost like a cap. From that crown, like drops of yellow blood, great globes of gold fell slowly! They crept sluggishly down the cheeks.

From the eyes ran slowly other huge golden drops—like tears.

And out of each down turned corner of the mouth the gold dripped live slaver!

The drops of golden sweat, the golden tears, the golden slaver rolled and joined a rivulet of gold that crept out from behind the Face, crawled sluggishly to the verge of the abyss and over its lip into the unfathomable depths—

"Look into my eyes! Look into my eyes!"

The command came to him—imperious, not to be disobeyed. It seemed to him that the face had spoken it. He stared again straight into the cold blue crystals. And forgotten now was its horror. All that he knew was—its promise.

Graydon dropped to the second step, then to the third. He wanted to run on, straight to that gigantic mask of black rock that sweated, wept and slavered gold, take from it what it offered—give it whatever it should demand in return—

He was thrust aside. Reeled and caught himself at the very edge of the stairway.

Past him rushed the three—gaunt man, giant man and little man.

He caught a glimpse of their faces. There was no blankness in them now, no vagueness. No, they were as men reborn. Their eyes were burning bright. And upon the face of each was set the stamp of the Face—its arrogance, its avarice, its recklessness and its cruelty.

Faster, faster they ran down the steps—rushing to the gigantic Face and what it had promised them. As it had promised—him!

Rage, murderous and confusing, shook him. By Heaven, they couldn't get away with that! Earth and the dominion of earth! They were his own for the taking. The Face had promised them to him first. He would kill them.

He leaped down behind them;

Something caught his feet, pinioned them, wrapped itself around his knees brought him to an abrupt halt. He heard a sharp hissing. Raging, cursing, he looked down. Around his ankles, around his knees, were the coils of a white serpent. It bound him tightly, like a rope. Its head was

level with his heart and its eyes looked unwinkingly into his.

For a breathless moment revulsion shook him, an instinctive and panic terror. He forgot the Face—forgot the three. The white serpent's head swayed: then shot forward, its gaze fastened upon something beyond him. Graydon's gaze followed its own.

He saw—the Snake Mother!

At one and the same time real and unreal, she lay stretched upon the radiant air, her shining lengths half coiled. She lay within the air directly between him and the Face. He saw her—and yet plainly through her he could see all that weird cavern and all that it held. Her purple eyes were intent upon him.

And instantly his rage and all the fiery poison of golden lust that had poured into him—were wiped away. In their place followed contrition, shame, a vast thankfulness.

He remembered—Suarra!

Through this phantom of the Snake Mother—if phantom it was—he stared full and fearlessly into the eyes of the Face. And their spell was broken. All that Graydon saw now was its rapacity, its ruthlessness and its horror.

The white serpent loosed its coils; released him! Slipped away. The phantom of the Snake Mother vanished.

Trembling, he looked down the stairway. The three men were at its end. They were running—running toward the Face. In the crystalline luminosity they stood out like moving figures cut from black cardboard. They were flattened by it—three outlines, sharp as silhouettes cut from black paper. Lank and gaunt silhouette, giant silhouette and little one, they ran side by side. And now they were at the point of the huge chin. He watched them pause there for an instant, striking at each other, each trying to push the other away. Then as one, and as though answering some summons irresistible, they began to climb up the cliffed chin of the Face—climbing Graydon knew up to the cold blue eyes and what those eyes had seemed to promise.

Now they were in the full focus of the driving rays, the storm of the luminous atoms. For an instant they stood out, still like three men cut from cardboard a little darker than the black stone.

Then they seemed to gray, their outlines to grow misty—nebulous. They ceased their climbing. They withheld as though in sudden intolerable agony.

THEY faded out!

Where they had been there hovered for a breath something like three wisps of stained cloud.

The wisps dissolved—like mist.

In their place stood out three glistening droplets of gold.

Sluggishly the three droplets began to roll down the Face. They drew together and became one. They dripped slowly down to the crawling golden stream, were merged with it—were carried to the lip of the abyss—

And over into the gulf!

From high over that gulf came the burst of the elfin horns. And now, in that strange light, Graydon saw at last what it was that sent forth these notes—what it was that had beaten out on the moonlit barren the souls of the three; breaking them; turning them into dead men walking.

Their bodies were serpents, sinuous, writhing and coiling, silver scaled. But they were serpents—winged. They dipped and drifted and eddied on snowy long feathered wings, blanched, phosphorescent plumes fringed like the tails of ghostly Birds of Paradise.

Large and small, some the size of the great python, some no longer than the little *fer-delance*, they writhed and coiled and spun through the sparkling air above the abyss,

trumpeting triumphantly, calling to each other with their voices like elfin horses.

Fencing joyously with each other with bills that were like thin, straight swords!

Winged serpents, Paradise plumed, whose bills were sharp rapiers. Winged serpents sending forth their pæans of faery trumpets while the crawling stream of which Soames — Danere — Sterrett — were now a part dripped, dripped, slowly, so slowly, down into the unfathomable void.

Graydon fell upon the great step, sick in every nerve and fiber of his being. He crept up the next, and the next — rolled over the last, past the edge of the rocky curtain, out of the brilliancy of the diamonded light and the sight of the Face and that trumpet clamor of the flying serpents.

He saw Suarra, flying to him, eyes wild with gladness.

Then he seemed to sink through wave after wave of darkness and oblivion.

CHAPTER IX.

"I am Going Back to Her"

GRAYDON wakened. "Suarra! Beloved!" he whispered, and stretched out eager arms.

Memory rushed back to him; he leaped to his feet, stared around him. He was in a dim forest glade. Beside him his burro nibbled placidly the grass.

"Suarra!" he cried again loudly.

A figure stirred in the shadows; came toward him. It was an Indian, but one of a type Graydon had never seen before. His features were delicate, fine. He wore a corselet and kilt of padded yellow silk. There was a circlet of gold upon his head and bracelets of the same metal on his upper arms.

The Indian held out a package wrapped in silk. He opened it. Within it was Suarra's bracelet of the dinosaurs and the *caraquenque* feather she wore when first he had seen her.

Graydon restored the feather in its covering, thrust it into the pocket over his heart. The bracelet, and why he did it he never knew, he slipped over his own wrist.

He spoke to the Indian in the Aymara. He smiled; shook his head. Nor did he seem to understand any of the half-dozen other dialects that Graydon tried. He pointed to the burro and then ahead. Graydon knew that he was telling him that he must go, and that he would show him the way.

They set forth. He tried to etch every foot of the path upon his memory, planning already for return. In a little while they came to the edge of a steep hill. Here the Indian paused, pointing down. Fifty feet or so below him Graydon saw a well marked trail. There was an easy descent, zigzagging down the hill side to it. Again the Indian pointed, and he realized that he was indicating which way to take upon the lower trail.

The Indian stood aside, bowed low and waited for him to pass down with the burro. He began the downward climb. The Indian stood watching him; and as Graydon reached a turn in the trail, he waved his hand in farewell and slipped back into the forest.

Graydon plodded slowly on for perhaps a mile farther. There he waited for an hour. Then he turned resolutely back; retraced his way to the hillside and driving his burro before him, quietly reclinced it.

In his brain and in his heart were but one thought and one desire—to return to Suarra. No matter what the peril—to go back to her.

He slipped over the edge of the hill and stood there for a moment, listening. He heard nothing. He pushed ahead of the burro; softly bade it follow; strode forward.

Instantly close above his head he heard a horn note sound, menacing, angry. There was a whirring of great wings.

Instinctively he threw up his arm. It was the one upon which he had slipped Suarra's bracelet. As he raised it, the purple stones that were the eyes of the snake woman carved upon it, flashed in the sun.

He heard the horn note again, protesting; curiously—startled. There was a whistling fury in the air close beside him as of some unseen winged creature striving frantically to check its flight.

Something struck the bracelet a glancing blow. He felt another sharp blow against his shoulder. A searing pain darted through the muscles. He felt blood gush from shoulder and neck. The buffet threw him backward. He fell and rolled over the edge of the hill and down its side.

In that fall his head struck a stone, stunning him. When he came to his senses he was lying at the foot of the slope, with the burro standing beside him. He must have lain there unconscious for considerable time, for the stained ground showed that he had lost much blood. The wound was in an awkward place for examination, but so far as he could see it was a clean puncture that had passed like a rapier thrust through the upper shoulder and out at the neck. It must have missed the artery by a hair.

And well he knew what had made that sound. One of the feathered serpents of the abyss.

The cliff or hill marked no doubt the limits of Yuatlanchi at that point. Had the strange Indian placed the creature there in anticipation of his return, or had it been one of those "Watchers" of whom Suarra had spoken and this frontier one of the regular points of observation? The latter, he was inclined to think, for the Indian had unquestionably been friendly.

And did not the bracelet and the *caraquenque* feather show that he had been Suarra's own messenger?

But Graydon could not go back, into the unknown perils, with such a wound. He must find help. That night the fever took him. The next day he met some friendly Indians. They ministered to him as best they could. But the fever grew worse and the wound a torment. He made up his mind to press on to Chupan, the nearest village where he might find better help than the Indians could give him.

He had stumbled on to Chupan, reached it on his last strength.

* * * * *

SUCH was Graydon's story.

If you ask me whether I believe it, or whether I think it the vagaries of a fever-stricken wanderer, I answer—I do believe it. Yes, from the first to the last, I believe it true. For remember, I saw his wound, I saw the bracelet of the dinosaurs and I listened to Graydon in his delirium. A man does not tell precisely the same thing in the cool blood of health that he raves of in delirium, not at least if these things are but fancies born of that delirium. He cannot. He forgets.

There was one thing that I found it hard to explain by any normal process.

"You say you saw this—well, Being—you call the Snake Mother as a phantom in the cavern of the Face?" I asked. But are you sure of that, Graydon? Are you sure that this was not hallucination—or some vision of your fever that you carried into waking!"

"No," he said. "No. I am very sure. I would not describe it. It was more—a projection of her image. You call what I saw a phantom. I only used that word to

forget, don't you, that other exercise of this inexplicable power of projection the night I was drawn into Yu-Atlanchi by her eyes? Well—of the reality of that first experience there cannot be the slightest doubt. I do not find the other more unbelievable than it."

"The cavern of the Face," he went on, thoughtfully. "That I think was a laboratory of Nature, a gigantic crucible where under certain rays of light a natural transmutation of one element into another took place.

"Within the rock, out of which the face was carved, was some mineral which under these rays was transformed into gold. A purely chemical process of which our race itself is not far from learning the secret, as you know.

"The Face! I think that it was an after thought of some genius of Yu-Atlanchi: He had taken the rock, worked upon it and symbolized so accurately man's universal hunger for gold, that inevitably he who looked upon it responded to its call. The sub-consciousness, the consciousness, too, leaped out in response to what the Face portrayed with such tremendous power. In proportion to the strength of that hunger, so was the strength of the response. Like calls to like the world over."

"But do you think that Soames and Sterrett and little Dancre really turned into gold?" I asked him.

"Frankly, of that I have my doubts," he answered. "It looked so. But the whole scene was so—well, so damnably devilish—that I can't quite trust to my impressions of that. It is possible that something else occurred. Unquestionably the concentration of the rays on the region about the Face was terrific. Beneath the bombardment of those radiant particles of force—whatever they were—the bodies of the three may simply have disintegrated. The droplets of gold may have been oozing from the rock behind them

and their position in the exact place where the three disappeared may also have been a vivid coincidence."

"That the flying serpents were visible in that light and not in normal light shows, I should think, that it must have been extraordinarily rich in the ultraviolet vibrations," I suggested.

He nodded.

"Of course that was it," he said. "Invisible in day or night light, it took the violet rays to record their outlines. They are probably a development of some form of flying saurian such as the ancient pterodactyls."

He mused for a moment.

"But they must have possessed a high degree of intelligence," he went on at last; "those serpents. Intelligence higher even than the dog—intelligence perhaps on a par with that of an elephant. The creature that struck me certainly recognized Suarra's bracelet. It was the recognition which checked it, I am sure. It tried to stop its thrust, but it was too late to do more than divert it.

"And that is why I think I am going to find her," he whispered.

"She wanted me to come back. She knew that I would. I think the bracelet is a talisman—or better still, a passport to carry me by the watchers, as she called them. It was not just as a remembrance that she gave it to me. No!"

"I will come back—and with her," he told me the day we clasped hands in farewell. I watched him until he and the little burro were hidden by the trees of the trail he must follow until he had reached the frontier of the haunted Cordillera, the gateway of those mysteries with which he had determined to grapple to wrest from them the maid he named Suarra.

But he has not come back.

THE END.



The MAN WHO SAVED *the* EARTH

By Austin Hall



Not a sound; the whole works a complicated mass covering a hundred acres, driving with a silence that was magic. Not a whirl nor friction. Like a living composite body pulsing and breathing the strange and mysterious force that had been evolved from

Huyck's theory of kinetics. The four great steel conduits running from the globes down the side of the mountain. In the center, at a point midway between the globes, a massive steel needle hung on a pivot and pointed directly at the sun.

CHAPTER I

The Beginning



VEN the beginning. From the start the whole thing has the precision of machine work. Fate and its working—and the wonderful Providence which watches over the Man and his future. The whole thing unerring; the incident, the work, the calamity, and the martyr. In the retrospect of disaster we may all of us grow strong in wisdom. Let us go into history.

A hot July day. A sun of scant pity, and a staggering street; panting thousands dragging along, hatless; fans and parasols; the sultry vengeance of a real day of summer. A day of bursting tires; hot pavements, and wrecked endeavor, heart-aches for the seashore, for leafy bowers beside rippling water, a day of broken hopes and listless ambition.

Perhaps Fate chose the day because of its heat and because of its natural benefit on fecundity. We have no way of knowing. But we do know this: the date, the time, the meeting; the boy with the burning glass and the old doctor. So commonplace, so trivial and hidden in obscurity! Who would have guessed it? Yet it is—after the creation—one of the most important dates in the world's history.

This is saying a whole lot. Let us go into it and see what it amounts to. Let us trace the thing out in history, weigh it up and balance it with sequence.

Of Charley Huyck we know nothing up to this day. It is a thing which, for some reason, he has always kept hidden. Recent investigation as to his previous life and antecedents have availed us nothing. Perhaps he could have told us: but as he has gone down as the world's great martyr, there is no hope of gaining from his lips what we would so like to know.

After all, it does not matter. We have the day—the incident, and its support, and its climax of sequence to

Also we have the blasted mountains and the lake of blue water which will ever live with his memory. His greatness is not of warfare, nor personal ambition; but of all mankind. The wreaths that we bestow upon him have no doubtful color. The man who saved the earth!

From such a beginning, Charley Huyck, lean and frail of body, with, even then, the wistfulness of the idealist, and the eyes of a poet. Charley Huyck, the boy, crossing the hot pavement with his pack of papers; the much treasured piece of glass in his pocket, and the sun which only he should master burning down upon him. A moment out of the ages; the turning of a straw destined to out-balance all the previous accumulation of man's history.

The sun was hot and burning, and the child—he could not have been more than ten—cast a glance over his shoulder. It was in the way of calculation. In the heyday of childhood he was not dragged down by the heat and weather: he had the enthusiasm of his half-score of years and the joy of the plaything. We will not presume to call it the spirit of the scientist, though it was, perhaps, the spark of latent investigation that was destined to lead so far.

A moment picked out of destiny! A boy and a plaything. Uncounted millions of boys have played with glass and the sun rays. Who cannot remember the little, round-burning dot in the palm of the hand and the subsequent exclamation? Charley Huyck had found a new toy, it was a simple thing and as old as glass. Fate will ever be so in her working.

And the doctor? Why should he have been waiting? If it was not destiny, it was at least an accumulation of moment. In the heavy eye-glasses, the quare, close-cut beard; and his uncompromising fact-seeking expression. Those who knew Dr. Robold are strong in the affirmation that he was the antithesis of all emotion. He was the sternest product of science: unbending, hardened by experiment, and caustic in his condemnation of the frailness of human nature.

It had been his one function to topple over the castles of the foolish; with his hard-seeing wisdom he had spotted sophistry where we thought it not. Even into the castles of science he had gone like a juggernaut. It is hard to have one's theories derided—yea, even for a scientist—and to be called a fool! Dr. Robold knew no middle language; he was not relished by science.

His memory, as we have it, is that of an eccentric. A man of slight compassion, abrupt of manner and with no tact in speaking. Genius is often so; it is a strange fact that many of the greatest men have been denied by their fellows. A great man and laughter. He was not accepted.

None of us know today what it cost Dr. Robold. He was not the man to tell us. Perhaps Charley Huyck might; but his lips are sealed forever. We only know that he retired to the mountain, and of the subsequent flood of benefits that rained upon mankind. And we still denied him. The great cynic on the mountain. Of the secrets of the place we know little. He was not the man to accept the investigator; he despised the curious. He had been laughed at—let be—he would work alone on the great moment of the future.

WE read of the days when the powers of radium were yet unknown. It is told us that burns were produced by incautiously carrying a tube of radium salts in the pocket. And here in this story we are told of a different power, opalescence, due to another element. It can destroy mountains, excavate cavities of immeasurable depths and kill human beings and animals in multitude. The story opens with a poor little boy experimenting with a burning glass. Then he becomes the hero of the story—he studies and eventually finds himself able to destroy the earth. He exceeds Archimedes in his power. And he suddenly finds that he has unlocked a power that threatens this very destruction. And the story depicts his horror at the Frankenstein which he had unloosed, and tells of his wild efforts to save humanity, and of the loss of the cosmic discoveries of the little newsboy grown up to be a great scientist.

In the light of the past we may well bend knee to the doctor and his protégé, Charley Huyck. Two men of destiny! What would we be without them? One shudders to think.

A little thing, and yet one of the greatest moments in the world's history. It must have been Fate. Why was it that this stern man, who hated all emotion, should so have unbended at this moment? That we cannot answer. But we can conjecture. Mayhap it is this: We were all wrong; we accepted the man's exterior and profession as the fact of his marrow.

No man can lose all emotion. The doctor, was, after all, even as ourselves—he was human. Whatever may be said, we have the certainty of that moment—and of Charley Huyck.

The sun's rays were hot; they were burning; the pavements were intolerable; the baked air in the canyon street was dancing like that of an oven; a day of dog-days. The boy crossing the street; his arms full of papers, and the glass bulging in his little hip-pocket.

At the curb he stopped. With such a sun it was impossible to long forget his plaything. He drew it carefully out of his pocket, lay down a paper and began distancing his glass for the focus. He did not notice the man beside

him. Why should he? The round dot, the brownish smoke, the red spark and the flash of flame! He stamped upon it. A moment out of boyhood; an experimental miracle as old as the age of glass, and just as delightful. The boy had spoiled the name of a great Governor of a great State; but the paper was still salable. He had had his moment. Mark that moment.

A hand touched his shoulder. The lad leaped up.

"Yessir. *Star* or *Bulletin*?"

"I'll take one of each," said the man. "There now. I was just watching you. Do you know what you were doing?"

"Yessir. Burning paper. Startin' fire. That's the way the Indians did it."

The man smiled at the perversion of fact. There is not such a distance between sticks and glass in the age of childhood.

"I know," he said—"the Indians. But do you know how it was done; the why—why the paper began to blaze?"

"Yessir."

"All right, explain."

The boy looked up at him. He was a city boy and used to the streets. Here was some old highbrow challenging his wisdom. Of course he knew.

"It's the sun."

"There," laughed the man. "Of course. You said you knew, but you don't. Why doesn't the sun, without the glass, burn the paper? Tell me that."

The boy was still looking at him; he saw that the man was not like the others on the street. It may be that the strange intimacy kindled into being at that moment. Certainly it was a strange unbending for the doctor.

"It would if it was hot enough or you could get enough of it together."

"Ah! Then that is what the glass is for, is it?"

"Yessir."

"Concentration?"

"Con—I don't know, sir. But it's the sun. She's sure some hot. I know a lot about the sun, sir. I've studied it with the glass. The glass picks up all the rays and puts them in one hole and that's what burns the paper."

"It's lots of fun. I'd like to have a bigger one; but it's all I've got. Why, do you know, if I had a glass big enough and a place to stand, I'd burn up the earth?"

The old man laughed. "Why, Archimedes! I thought you were dead."

"My name ain't Archimedes. It's Charley Huyck."

Again the man laughed.

"Oh, is it? Well, that's a good name, too. And if you keep on you'll make it famous as the name of the other." Wherein he was foretelling history. "Where do you live?"

The boy was still looking. Ordinarily he would not have told, but he motioned back with his thumb.

"I don't live; I room over on Brennan Street."

"Oh, I see. You room. Where's your mother?"

"Search me; I never saw her."

"I see; and your father?"

"How do I know. He went floating when I was four years old."

"Floating?"

"Yessir—to sea."

"So your mother's gone and your father's floating. Archimedes is adrift. You go to school?"

"Yessir."

"What reader?"

"No reader. Sixth grade."

"I see. What school?"

"School Twenty-six. Say, it's hot. I can't stand here all day. I've got to sell my papers."

The man pulled out a purse.

"I'll take the lot," he said. Then kindly: "My boy, I would like to have you go with me."

It was a strange moment. A little thing with the fates looking on. When destiny plays she picks strange moments. This was one. Charley Huyck went with Dr. Robold.

CHAPTER II

The Poison Pall

WE all of us remember that fatal day when the news startled all of Oakland. No one can forget it. At first it read like a newspaper hoax, in spite of the oft-proclaimed veracity of the press, and we were inclined to laughter. 'Twixt wonder at the story and its impossibilities we were not a little enthused at the nerve of the man who put it over.

It was in the days of the dry reading. The world had grown populous and of well-fed content. Our soap-box artists had come to the point at last where they preached, not disaster, but a full-belliced thanks to the millennium that was here. A period of Utopian quietness—no villain around the corner; no man to covet the ox of his neighbor.

Quiet reading, you'll admit. Nothing ever happened. Here's hoping they never come again. And then:

Honestly, we were not to blame for bestowing blessing out of our hearts upon the newspapermen. Even if it were a hoax, it was at least something.

At high noon. The clock in the city hall had just struck the hour that held the post 'twixt a.m. and p.m., a hot day with a sky that was clear and azure; a quiet day of serene peace and contentment. A strange and a portent moment. Looking back and over the miracle we may conjecture that it was the clearness of the atmosphere and the brightness of the sun that helped to the impact of the disaster. Knowing what we know now we can appreciate the impulse of natural phenomena. It was *not* a miracle.

The spot: Fourteenth and Broadway, Oakland, California.

Fortunately the thousands of employees in the stores about had not yet come out for their luncheons. The lapse that it takes to put a hat on, or to pat a ribbon, saved a thousand lives. One shudders to think of what would have happened had the spot been crowded. Even so, it was too impossible and too terrible to be true. Such things could not happen.

At high noon: Two street-cars crossing Fourteenth on Broadway—two cars with the same joggle and bump and the same aspect of any of a hundred thousand at a traffic corner. The wonder is—there were so few people. A Telegraph car outgoing, and a Broadway car coming in. The traffic policeman at his post had just given his signal. Two automobiles were passing and a single pedestrian, so it is said, was working his way diagonally across the corner. Of this we are not certain.

It was a moment that impinged on miracle. Even as we recount it, knowing, as we do, the explanation, we sense the impossibility of the event. A phenomenon that holds out and, in spite of our findings, lingers into the miraculous. To be and not to be. One moment life and action, an ordinary scene of existent monotony; and the next moment nothing. The spot, the intersection of the street, the passing street-cars, the two automobiles, pedestrian, the policeman—non-existent! When events are instantaneous reports are apt to be misleading. This is what we find.

Some of those who beheld it, report a flash of bluish white light; others report that it was a greenish or even violet hue; and others, no doubt of stronger vision report that it was not only of a predominant color but that it was shot and sparkled with a myriad specks of flame and burning.

It gave no warning and it made no sound; not even a whir. Like a hot breath out of the void. Whatever the forces that had focused, they were destruction. There was no Fourteenth and Broadway. The two automobiles, the two street-cars, the pedestrian, the policeman had been whiffed away as if they had never existed. In place of the intersection of the thoroughfares was a yawning gulf that looked down into the center of the earth to a depth of nausea.

It was instantaneous; it was without sound; no warning. A tremendous force of unlimited potentiality had been loosed to kinetic violence. It was the suddenness and the silence that belied credence. We were accustomed to associate all disaster with confusion; calamity has an affinity with pandemonium, all things of terror climax into sound. In this case there was no sound. Hence the wonder.

A hole or bore forty feet in diameter. Without a particle of warning and without a bit of confusion. The spectators one and all aver that at first they took it for nothing more than the effect of startled eyesight. Almost subtle. It was not until after a full minute's reflection that they became aware that a miracle had been wrought before their eyes. Then the crowd rushed up and with awe and now awakened terror gazed down into that terrible pit.

We say "terrible" because in this case it is an exact adjective. The strangest hole that man ever looked into. It was so deep that at first it appeared to have no bottom; not even the strongest eyesight could penetrate the smoldering blackness that shrouded the depths descending. It took a stout heart and courage to stand and hold one's head on the brink for even a minute.

It was straight and precipitous; a perfect circle in shape; with sides as smooth as the effect of machine work, the pavement and stone curb had been cut as if by a razor. Of the two street cars, two automobiles and their occupants there was nothing. The whole thing so silent and complete. Not even the spectators could really believe it.

It was a hard thing to believe. The newspapers themselves, when the news came clamoring, accepted it with reluctance. It was too much like a hoax. Not until the most trusted reporters had gone and had wired in their reports would they even consider it. Then the whole world sat up and took notice.

A miracle! Like Oakland's *Press* we all of us doubted that hole. We had attained almost everything that was worth the knowing; we were the masters of the earth and its secrets and we were proud of our wisdom; naturally we refused such reports all out of reason. It must be a hoax.

But the wires were persistent. Came corroboration. A reliable news-gathering organization soon was coming through with elaborate and detailed accounts of just what was happening. We had the news from the highest and most reputable authority.

And still we doubted. It was the story itself that brought the doubting; its touch on miracle. It was too easy to pick on the reporter. There might be a hole, and all that; but this thing of no explanation! A bomb perhaps? No noise? Some new explosive? No such thing? Well, how did we know? It was better than a miracle.

Then came the scientists. As soon as could be men of great minds had been hustled to the scene. The world had long been accustomed to accept without quibble the dictum of these great specialists of fact. With their train of accomplishments behind them we would hardly be consistent were we to doubt them.

We know the scientist and his habits. He is the one man who will believe nothing until it is proved. It is his profession, and for that we pay him. He can catch the smallest bug that ever crawled out of an atom and give it a name so long that a Polish wrestler, if he had to bear it,

would break under the burden. It is his very knack of getting in under that has given us our civilization. You don't baffle a scientist in our Utopia. It can't be done. Which is one of the very reasons why we began to believe in the miracle.

In a few moments a crowd of many thousands had gathered about the spot; the throng grew so dense that there was peril of some of them being crowded into the pit at the center. It took all the spare policemen of the city to beat them back far enough to string ropes from the corners. For blocks the streets were packed with wondering thousands. Street traffic was impossible. It was necessary to divert the cars to a roundabout route to keep the arteries open to the suburbs.

Wild rumors spread over the city. No one knew how many passengers had been upon the streets cars. The officials of the company, from the schedule, could pick the numbers of the cars and their crews; but who could tell of the occupants?

Telephones rang with tearful pleadings. When the first rumors of the horror leaked out every wife and mother felt the clutch of panic at her heartstrings. It was a moment of historical psychology. Out of our books we had read of this strange phase of human nature that was wont to rise like a mad screeching thing out of disaster. We had never had it in Utopia.

It was rumbling at first and out of exaggeration; as the tale passed farther back to the waiting thousands it gained with the repetition. Grim and terrible enough in fact, it ratioed up with reiteration. Perhaps after all it was not psychology. The average impulse of the human mind does not even up so exactly. In the light of what we now know it may have been the poison that had leaked into the air; the new element that was permeating the atmosphere of the city.

At first it was spasmodic. The nearest witnesses of the disaster were the first victims. A strange malady began to spot out among those of the crowd who had been at the spot of contact. This is to be noticed. A strange affliction which from the virulence and rapidity of action was quite puzzling to the doctors.

Those among the physicians who would consent to a statement gave it out that it was breaking down of tissue. Which of course it was; the new element that was radiating through the atmosphere of the city. They did not know it then.

The pity of it! The subtle, odorless pall was silently shrouding out over the city. In a short time the hospitals were full and it was necessary to call in medical aid from San Francisco. They had not even time for diagnosis. The new plague was fatal almost at conception. Happily the scientists made the discovery.

It was the pall. At the end of three hours it was known that the death sheet was spreading out over Oakland. We may thank our stars that it was learned so early. Had the real warning come a few hours later the death list would have been appalling.

A new element had been discovered; or if not a new element, at least something which was tipping over all the laws of the atmospheric envelope. A new combination that was fatal. When the news and the warning went out, panic fell upon the bay shore.

But some men stuck. In the face of such terror there were those who stayed and with grimness and sacrifice hung to their posts for mankind. There are some who had said that the stuff of heroes had passed away. Let them then consider the case of John Robinson.

Robinson was a telegraph operator. Until that day he was a poor unknown; not a whit better than his fellows. Now he has a name that will run in history. In the face of what he knew he remained under the blanket. The last

words out of Oakland—his last message to the world:

"Whole city of Oakland in grip of strange madness. Keep out of Oakland,"—following which came a haphazard personal commentary:

"I can feel it coming on myself. It is like what our ancestors must have felt when they were getting drunk—alternating desires of fight and singing—a strange sensation, light, and ecstatic with a spasmodic twitching over the forehead. Terribly thirsty. Will stick it out if I can get enough water. Never so dry in my life."

Followed a lapse of silence. Then the last words:

"I guess we're done for. There is some poison in the atmosphere—something. It has leaked, of course, out of this thing at Fourteenth and Broadway. Dr. Manson of the American Institute says it is something new that is forming a fatal combination; but he cannot understand a new element; the quantity is too enormous."

"Populace has been warned out of the city. All roads are packed with refugees. The Berkeley Hills are covered as with flies—north, east, and south and on the boats to Frisco. The poison, whatever it is, is advancing in a ring from Fourteenth and Broadway. You have got to pass it to these old boys of science. They are staying with that ring. Already they have calculated the rate of its advance and have given warning. They don't know what it is, but they have figured just how fast it is moving. They have saved the city."

"I am one of the few men now inside the wave. Out of curiosity I have stuck. I have a jug and as long as it lasts I shall stay. Strange feeling. Dry, dry, dry, as if the juice of one's life cells was turning into dust. Water evaporating almost instantly. It cannot pass through glass. Whatever the poison it has an affinity for moisture. Do not understand it. I have had enough—"

That was all. After that there was no more news out of Oakland. It is the only word that we have out of the pall itself. It was short and disconnected and a bit slangy; but for all that a basis from which to conjecture.

It is a strange and glorious thing how some men will stick to the post of danger. This operator knew that it meant death; but he held with duty. Had he been a man of scientific training his information might have been of incalculable value. However, may God bless his heroic soul!

What we know is thirst! The word that came from the experts confirmed it. Some new element of force was stealing or sapping the humidity out of the atmosphere. Whether this was combining and entering into a poison could not be determined.

Chemists worked frantically at the outposts of the advancing ring. In four hours it had covered the city; in six it had reached San Leandro, and was advancing on toward Haywards.

It was a strange story and incredible from the beginning. No wonder the world doubted. Such a thing had never happened. We had accepted the law of judging the future by the past; by deduction; we were used to sequence and to law; to the laws of Nature. This thing did look like a miracle; which was merely because—as usually it is with "miracles"—we could not understand it. Happily, we can look back now and still place our faith in Nature.

The world doubted and was afraid. Was this peril to spread slowly over the whole state of California and then on to the world. Doubt always precedes terror. A tense world waited. Then came the word of reassurance—from the scientists:

"Danger past; vigor of the ring is abating. Calculation has deduced that the wave is slowly decreasing in potentiality. It is too early yet to say that there will be recessions, as the wave is just reaching its zenith. What it is we cannot say; but it cannot be inexplicable. After a

little time it will all be explained. Say to the world there is no cause for alarm."

But the world was now aroused; as it doubted the truth before, it doubted now the reassurance. Did the scientists know? Could they have only seen the future! We know now that they did not. There was but one man in all the world great enough to foresee disaster. That man was Charley Huyck.

CHAPTER III

The Mountain That Was

THE same day when all this happened, a young man, Pizzosi by name and of Italian parentage, left the town of Lone in Amador County, California, with a small truck-load of salt. He was one of the cattlemen whose headquarters or home-farms are clustered about the foothills of the Sierras. In the wet season they stay with their home-land in the valley; in the summer they penetrate into the mountains. Pizzosi had driven in from the mountains the night before, after salt. He had been on the road since midnight.

Two thousand salt-hungry cattle do not allow time for gossip. With the thrift of his race, Joe had loaded up his truck and after a running snatch at breakfast was headed back into the mountains. When the news out of Oakland was thrilling around the world he was far into the Sierras.

The summer quarters of Pizzosi were close to Mt. Heckla, whose looming shoulders rose square in the center of the pasture of the three brothers. It was not a noted mountain—that is, until this day—and had no reason for a name other than that it was a peak outstanding from the range; like a thousand others; rugged, pine clad, coated with deer-brush, red soil, and mountain miserie.

It was the deer-brush that gave it value to the Pizzosis—a succulent feed richer than alfalfa. In the early summer they would come up with bony cattle. When they returned in the fall they went out driving beef-steaks. But inland cattle must have more than forage. Salt is the tincture that makes them healthy.

It was far past the time of the regular salting. Pizzosi was in a hurry. It was nine o'clock when he passed through the mining town of Jackson; and by twelve o'clock—the minute of the disaster—he was well beyond the last little hamlet that linked up with civilization. It was four o'clock when he drew up at the little pine-sheltered cabin that was his headquarters for the summer.

He had been on the road since midnight. He was tired. The long weary hours of driving, the grades, the unvaried stress through the deep red dust, the heat, the stretch of a night and day had worn both mind and muscle. It had been his turn to go after salt; now that he was here, he could lie in for a bit of rest while his brothers did the salting.

It was a peaceful spot! this cabin of the Pizzosis; nestled among the virgin shade trees, great tall feathery sugar-pines with a mountain live-oak spreading over the door yard. To the east the rising heights of the Sierras, misty, gray-green, undulating into the distance to the pink-white snow crests of Little Alpine. Below in the canyon, the waters of the Mokelumne; to the west the heavy dark masses of Mt. Heckla, deep verdant in the cool of coming evening.

Joe drew up under the shade of the live oak. The air was full of cool, sweet scent of the afternoon. No moment could have been more peaceful; the blue clear sky overhead, the breath of summer, and the soothing spice of the pine trees. A shepherd dog came bounding from the doorway to meet him.

It was his favorite cow dog. Usually when Joe came back the dog would be far down the road to forestall him. He had wondered, absently, coming up, at the dog's delay. A dog is most of all a creature of habit; only something unusual would detain him. However the dog was here; as the man drew up he rushed out to greet him. A rush, a circle, a bark, and a whine of welcome. Perhaps the dog had been asleep.

But Joe noticed that whine; he was wise in the ways of dogs; when Ponto whined like that there was something unusual. It was not effusive or spontaneous; but rather of the delight of succor. After scarce a minute of petting, the dog squatted and faced to the westward. His whine was startling; almost fearful.

Pizzosi knew that something was wrong. The dog drew up, his stub tail erect, and his hair all bristled; one look was for his master and the other whining and alert to Mt. Heckla. Puzzled, Joe gazed at the mountain. But he saw nothing.

Was it the canine instinct, or was it coincidence? We have the account from Pizzosi. From the words of the Italian, the dog was afraid. It was not the way of Ponto; usually in the face of danger he was alert and eager; now he drew away to the cabin. Joe wondered.

Inside the shack he found nothing but evidence of departure. There was no sign of his brothers. It was his turn to go to sleep; he was wearied almost to numbness, for forty-eight hours he had not closed an eyelid. On the table were a few unwashed dishes and crumbs of eating. One of the three rifles that hung usually on the wall was missing; the coffee pot was on the floor with the lid open. On the bed the coverlets were mussed up. It was a temptation to go to sleep. Back of him the open door and Ponto. The whine of the dog drew his will and his consciousness into correlation. A faint rustle in the sugar-pines sougled from the canyon.

Joe watched the dog. The sun was just glowing over the crest of the mountain; on the western line the deep lacy silhouettes of the pine trees and the bare bald head of Heckla. What was it? His brothers should be on hand for the salting; it was not their custom to put things off for the morrow. Shading his eyes he stepped out of the doorway.

The dog rose stealthily and walked behind him, uneasily, with the same insistent whine and ruffled hair. Joe listened. Only the mountain murmurs, the sweet breath of the forest, and in the lapse of bated breath the rippling melody of the river far below him.

"What you see, Porto? What you see?"

At the words the dog sniffed and advanced slightly—a growl and then a sudden scurry to the heels of his master. Ponto was afraid. It puzzled Pizzosi. But whatever it was that roused his fear, it was on Mt. Heckla.

This is one of the strange parts of the story—the part the dog played, and what came after. Although it is a trivial thing it is one of the most inexplicable. Did the dog sense it? We have no measure for the range of instinct, but we do have it that before the destruction of Pompeii the beasts roared in their cages. Still, knowing what we now know, it is hard to accept the analogy. It may, after all have been coincidence.

Nevertheless it decided Pizzosi. The cattle needed salt. He would catch up his pinto and ride over to the salt logs.

There is no moment in the cattle industry quite like the salting on the range. It is not the most spectacular perhaps, but surely it is not lacking in intenseness. The way of Pizzosi was musical even if not operatic. He had a long-range call, a rising rhythm that for depth and tone had a peculiar effect on the shattered stillness. It echoed and reverberated, and peeled from the top to the bottom

of the mountain. The salt call is the talisman of the mountains.

"Alleewahoo!"

Two thousand cattle augmented by a thousand strays held up their heads in answer. The sniff of the welcome salt call! Through the whole range of the man's voice the stock stopped in their leafy pasture and listened.

"Alleewahoo!"

An old cow bellowed. It was the beginning of bedlam. From the bottom of the mountain to the top and for miles beyond went forth the salt call. Three thousand head bellowed to the delight of salting.

Pizzosi rode along. Each lobe of his pinto through the tall tangled miserie was accented. "Alleewahoo! Alleewahoo!" The rending of brush, the confusion, and pandemonium spread to the very bottom of the leafy gulches. It is no place for a pedestrian. Heads and tails erect, the cattle were stampeding toward the logs.

A few head had beat him to it. These he quickly drove away and cut the sack open. With haste he poured it upon the logs; then he rode out of the dust that for yards about the place was tramped to the finest powder. The center of a herd of salting range stock is no place for comfort. The man rode away; to the left he ascended a low knob where he would be safe from the stampede; but close enough to distinguish the brands.

In no time the place was alive with milling stock. Old cows, heifers, bulls, calves, steers rushed out of the crashing brush into the clearing. There is no moment exactly like it. What before had been a broad clearing of brownish reddish dust was trampled into a vast cloud of bellowing blur, a thousand cattle, and still coming. From the farthest height came the echoing call. Pizzosi glanced up at the top of the mountain.

And then a strange thing happened.

From what we gathered from the excited accounts of Pizzosi it was instantaneous; and yet by the same words it was of such a peculiar and beautiful effect as never to be forgotten. A bluish azure shot through with a myriad flecks of crimson, a peculiar vividness of opalescence; the whole world scintillating; the sky, the air, the mountain, a vast flame of color so wide and so intense that there seemed not a thing beside it. And instantaneous—it was over almost before it was started. No noise or warning, and no subsequent detonation; as silent as winking and much, indeed, like the queer blur of color induced by defective vision. All in the fraction of a second. Pizzosi had been gazing at the mountain. There was no mountain!

Neither were there cattle. Where before had been the shade of the towering peak was now the rays of the western sun. Where had been the blur of the milling herd and its deafening pandemonium was now a strange silence. The transparency of the air was unbroken into the distance. Far off lay a peaceful range in the sunset. There was no mountain! Neither were there cattle!

For a moment the man had enough to do with his plunging mustang. In the blur of the subsequent second Pizzosi remembers nothing but a convulsion of fighting horseflesh bucking, twisting, plunging, the gentle pinto suddenly maddened into a demon. It required all the skill of the cowman to retain his saddle.

He did not know that he was riding on the rim of Eternity. In his mind was the dim subconscious realization of a thing that had happened. In spite of all his efforts the horse fought backward. It was some moments before he conquered. Then he looked.

It was a slow, hesitant moment. One cannot account for what he will do in the open face of a miracle. What the Italian beheld was enough for terror. The sheer immensity of the thing was too much for thinking.

At the first sight his simplex mind went numb from sheer impotence; his terror to a degree frozen. The whole of Mt. Heckla had been shorn away; in the place of its darkened shadow the sinking sun was blinking in his face; the whole western sky all golden. There was no vestige of the flat salt-clearing at the base of the mountain. Of the two thousand cattle milling in the dust not a one remained. The man crossed himself in stupor. Mechanically he put the spurs to the pinto.

But the mustang would not go. Another struggle with bucking, fighting, maddened horseflesh. The cow-man must needs bring in all the skill of his training; but by the time he had conquered his mind had settled within some scope of comprehension.

The pony had good reasons for his terror. This time though the man's mind reeled it did not go dumb at the clash of immensity. Not only had the whole mountain been torn away, but its roots as well. The whole thing was up-side down; the world torn to its entrails. In place of what had been the height was a gulf so deep that its depths were blackness.

He was standing on the brink. He was a cool man, was Pizzosi; but it was hard in the confusion of such a miracle to think clearly; much less to reason. The prancing mustang was snorting with terror. The man glanced down.

The very dizziness of the gulf, sheer, losing itself into shadows and chaos overpowered him, his mind now clear enough for perception reeled at the distance. The depth was nauseating. His whole body succumbed to a sudden qualm of weakness: the sickness that comes just before falling. He went limp in the saddle.

But the horse fought backward; warned by instinct it drew back from the sheer banks of the gulf. It had no reason but its nature. At the instant it sensed the snapping of the iron will of its master. In a moment it had turned and was racing on its wild way out of the mountains. At supreme moments a cattle horse will always hit for home. The pinto and its limp rider were fleeing on the road to Jackson.

Pizzosi had no knowledge of what had occurred in Oakland. To him the whole thing had been but a flash of miracle; he could not reason. He did not curb his horse. That he was still in the saddle was due more to the near-instinct of his training than to his volition.

He did not even draw up at the cabin. That he could make better time with his motor than with his pinto did not occur to him; his mind was far too busy; and, now that the thing was passed, too full of terror. It was forty-four miles to town; it was night and the stars were shining when he rode into Jackson.

CHAPTER IV.

"MAN—A Great Little Bug"

AND what of Charley Huyck? It was his anticipation, and his training which leaves us here to tell the story. Were it not for the strange manner of his rearing, and the keen faith and appreciation of Dr. Robold there would be to-day no tale to tell. The little incident of the burning-glass had grown. If there is no such thing as Fate there is at least something that comes very close to being Destiny.

On this night we find Charley at the observatory in Arizona. He is a grown man and a great one, and though mature not so very far drawn from the lad we met on the street selling papers. Tall, slender, very slightly stooped and with the same idealistic, dreaming eyes of the poet. Surely no one at first glance would have taken him for a scientist. Which he was and was not.

Indeed, there is something vastly different about the science of Charley Huyck. Science to be sure, but not prosaic. He was the first and perhaps the last of the school of Dr. Robold, a peculiar combination of poetry and fact, a man of vision, of vast, far-seeing faith and idealism linked and based on the coldest and sternest truths of materialism. A peculiar tenet of the theory of Robold: "True science to be itself should be half poetry." Which any of us who have read or been at school know it is not. It is a peculiar theory and though rather wild still with some points in favor.

We all of us know our schoolmasters; especially those of science and what they stand for. Facts, facts, nothing but facts; no dreams or romance. Looking back we can grant them just about the emotions of cucumbers. We remember their cold, hard features, the prodding after fact, the accumulation of data. Surely there is no poetry in them.

Yet we must not deny that they have been by far the most potent of all men in the progress of civilization. Not even Robold would deny it.

The point is this:

The doctor maintained that from the beginning the progress of material civilization had been along three distinct channels; science, invention, and administration. It was simply his theory that the first two should be one; that the scientist deal not alone with dry fact but with invention, and that the inventor, unless he is a scientist, has mastered but half his trade. "The really great scientist should be a visionary," said Robold, "and an inventor is merely a poet, with tools."

Which is where we get Charley Huyck. He was a visionary, a scientist, a poet with tools, the protégé of Dr. Robold. He dreamed things that no scientist had thought of. And we are thankful for his dreaming.

The one great friend of Huyck was Professor Williams, a man from Charley's home city, who had known him even back in the days of selling papers. They had been cronies in boyhood, in their teens, and again at College. In after years, when Huyck had become the visionary, the mysterious Man of the Mountain, and Williams a great professor of astronomy, the friendship was as strong as ever.

But there was a difference between them. Williams was exact to acuteness, with not a whit of vision beyond pure science. He had been reared in the old stone-cold theory of exactness; he lived in figures. He could not understand Huyck or his reasoning. Perfectly willing to follow as far as facts permitted he refused to step off into speculation.

Which was the point between them. Charley Huyck had vision; although exact as any man, he had ever one part of his mind soaring out into speculation. What is, and what might be, and the gulf between. To bridge the gulf was the life work of Charley Huyck.

In the snug little office in Arizona we find them; Charley with his feet poised on the desk and Williams precise and punctilious, true to his training, defending the exactness of his philosophy. It was the cool of the evening; the sun was just mellowing the heat of the desert. Through the open door and windows a cool wind was blowing. Charley was smoking; the same old pipe had been the bane of Williams's life at college.

"Then we know?" he was asking.

"Yes," spoke the professor, "what we know, Charley, we know; though of course it is not much. It is very hard, nay impossible, to deny figures. We have not only the proofs of geology but of astronomical calculation; we have facts and figures plus our sidereal relations all about us.

"The world must come to an end. It is a hard thing to say it, but it is a fact of science. Slowly, inevitably,

ruthlessly, the end will come. A mere question of arithmetic."

Huyck nodded. It was his special function in life to differ with his former roommate. He had come down from his own mountain in Colorado just for the delight of difference.

"I see. Your old calculations of tidal retardation. Or if that doesn't work the loss of oxygen and the water."

"Either one or the other; a matter of figures; the earth is being drawn every day by the sun: its rotation is slowing up; when the time comes it will act to the sun in exactly the same manner as the moon acts to the earth to-day."

"I understand. It will be a case of eternal night for one side of the earth, and eternal day for the other. A case of burn up or freeze up."

"Exactly. Or if it doesn't reach to that, the water gas will gradually lose out into sidereal space and we will go to desert. Merely a question of the old dynamical theory of gases; of the molecules to be in motion, to be forever colliding and shooting out into variance."

"Each minute, each hour, each day we are losing part of our atmospheric envelope. In course of time it will all be gone; when it is we shall be all desert. For instance, take a look outside. This is Arizona. Once it was the bottom of a deep blue sea. Why deny when we can already behold the beginning."

The other laughed.

"Pretty good mathematics at that, professor. Only—"

"Only?"

"That it is merely mathematics."

"Merely mathematics?" The professor frowned slightly. "Mathematics do not lie, Charlie, you cannot get away from them. What sort of fanciful argument are you bringing up now?"

"Simply this," returned the other, "that you depend too much on figures. They are material and in the nature of things can only be employed in a calculation of what may happen in the future. You must have premises to stand on, facts. Your figures are rigid: they have no elasticity; unless your foundations are permanent and faultless your deductions will lead you only into error."

"Granted; just the point: we know where we stand. Whercin are we in error?"

It was the old point of difference. Huyck was ever crashing down the idols of pure materialism. Williams was of the world-wide school.

"You are in error, my dear professor, in a very little thing and a very large one."

"What is that?"

"Man."

"Man?"

"Yes. He's a great little bug. You have left him out of your calculation—which he will upset."

The professor smiled indulgently. "I'll allow; he is at least a conceited bug; but you surely cannot grant him much when pitted against the Universe."

"No? Did it ever occur to you, Professor, what the Universe is? The stars for instance? Space, the immeasurable distance of Infinity. Have you never dreamed?"

Williams could not quite grasp him. Huyck had a habit that had grown out of childhood. Always he would allow his opponent to commit himself. The professor did not answer. But the other spoke.

"Ether. You know it. Whether mind or granite. For instance, your desert." He placed his finger to his forehead. "Your mind, my mind—localized ether."

"What are you driving at?"

"Merely this. Your universe has intelligence. It has mind as well as matter. The little knot called the earth is becoming conscious. Your deductions are incompetent

unless they embrace mind as well as matter, and they cannot do it. Your mathematics are worthless."

The professor bit his lip.

"Always fanciful," he commented, "and visionary. Your argument is beautiful, Charley, and hopeful. I would that it were true. But all things must mature. Even an earth must die."

"Not our earth. You look into the past, professor, for your proof, and I look into the future. Give a planet long enough time in maturing and it will develop life; give it still longer and it will produce intelligence. Our own earth is just coming into consciousness; it has thirty million years, at least, to run."

"You mean?"

"This. That man is a great little bug. Mind: the intelligence of the earth."

This of course is a bit dry. The conversation of such men very often is to those who do not care to follow them. But it is very pertinent to what came after. We know now, everyone knows, that Charley Huyck was right. Even Professor Williams admits it. Our earth is conscious. In less than twenty-four hours it had to employ its consciousness to save itself from destruction.

A bell rang. It was the private wire that connected the office with the residence. The professor picked up the receiver. "Just a minute. Yes? All right." Then to his companion: "I must go over to the house, Charley. We have plenty of time. When I return, we can go up to the observatory."

Which shows how little we know about ourselves. Poor Professor Williams! Little did he think that those casual words were the last he would ever speak to Charley Huyck.

The whole world seething! The beginning of the end! Charley Huyck in the vortex. The next few hours were to be the most strenuous of the planet's history.

CHAPTER V.

Approaching Disaster

IT was night. The stars which had just been coming out were spotted by millions over the sleeping desert. One of the nights that are peculiar to the country, which we all of us know so well, if not from experience, at least from hearsay; mellow, soft, sprinkled like salted fire, twinkling.

Each little light a message out of infinity. Cosmic grandeur; mind: chaos, eternity—a night for dreaming. Whoever had chosen the spot in the desert had picked full well. Charley had spoken of consciousness. On that night when he gazed up at the stars he was its personification. Surely a good spirit was watching over the earth.

A cool wind was blowing; on its breath floated the murmurs from the village; laughter, the song of children, the purring of motors and the startled barking of a dog; the confused drone of man and his civilization. From the eminence the observatory looked down upon the town and the sheen of light, spotting like jewels in the dim glow of the desert. To the east the mellow moon just tipping over the mountain. Charley stepped to the window.

He could see it all. The subtle beauty that was so akin to poetry: the stretch of desert, the mountains, the light in the eastern sky; the dull level shadow that marked the plain to the northward. To the west the mountains looming black to the star line. A beautiful night; sweetened with the breath of desert and tuned to its slumber.

Across the lawn he watched the professor descending the pathway under the acacias. An automobile was coming up the driveway; as it drove up under the arcs he noticed its powerful lines and its driver; one of those splendid pleasure cars that have returned to favor during

the last decade; the soft purr of its motor, the great heavy tires and its coating of dust. There is a lure about a great car coming in from the desert. The car stopped, Charley noted. Doubtless some one for Williams. If it were, he would go into the observatory alone.

In the strict sense of the word Huyck was not an astronomer. He had not made it his profession. But for all that he knew things about the stars that the more exact professors had not dreamed of. Charley was a dreamer. He had a code all his own and a manner of reasoning. Between him and the star lay a secret.

He had not divulged it, or if he had, it was in such an open way that it was laughed at. It was not cold enough in calculation or, even if so, was too far from their deduction. Huyck had imagination; his universe was alive and potent; it had intelligence. Matter could not live without it. Man was its manifestation; just come to consciousness. The universe teemed with intelligence. Charley looked at the stars.

He crossed the office, passed through the reception-room and thence to the stairs that led to the observatory. In the time that would lapse before the coming of his friend he would have ample time for observation. Somehow he felt that there was time for discovery. He had come down to Arizona to employ the lens of his friend the astronomer. The instrument that he had erected on his own mountain in Colorado had not given him the full satisfaction that he expected. Here in Arizona, in the dry clear air, which had hitherto given such splendid results, he hoped to find what he was after. But little did he expect to discover the terrible thing he did.

It is one of the strangest parts of the story that he should be here at the very moment when Fate and the world's safety would have had him. For years he and Dr. Robold had been at work on their visionary projects. They were both dreamers. While others had scoffed they had silently been at their great work on kinetics.

The boy and the burning glass had grown under the tutelage of Dr. Robold: the time was about at hand when he could out-rival the saying of Archimedes. Though the world knew it not, Charley Huyck had arrived at the point where he could literally burn up the earth.

But he was not sinister; though he had the power he had of course not the slightest intention. He was a dreamer and it was part of his dream that man break his thralldom to the earth and reach out into the universe. It was a great conception and were it not for the terrible event which took his life we have no doubt but that he would have succeeded.

It was ten-thirty when he mounted the steps and seated himself. He glanced at his watch; he had a good ten minutes. He had computed before just the time for the observation. For months he had waited for just this moment; he had not hoped to be alone and now that he was in solitary possession he counted himself fortunate. Only the stars and Charley Huyck knew the secret; and not even he dreamed what it would amount to.

From his pocket he drew a number of papers; most of them covered with notations; some with drawings; and a good sized map in colors. This he spread before him, and with his pencil began to draw right across its face a net of lines and cross lines. A number of figures and a rapid computation. He nodded and then he made the observation.

It would have been interesting to study the face of Charley Huyck during the next few moments. At first he was merely receptive, his face placid but with the studious intentness of one who has come to the moment; and as he began to find what he was after—an eagerness of satisfaction. Then a queer blankness; the slight movement of his body stopped, and the tapping of his feet ceased entirely.

For a full five minutes an absolute intentness. During that time he was out among the stars beholding what not even he had dreamed of. It was more than a secret: and what it was only Charley Huyck of all the millions of men could have recognized. Yet it was more than even he had expected. When he at last drew away his face was chalk-like; great drops of sweat stood on his forehead; and the terrible truth in his eyes made him look ten years older.

"My God!"

For a moment indecision and strange impotence. The truth he had beheld numbed action; from his lips the unnumbered words:

"This world; my world; our great and splendid mankind!"

A sentence that was despair and a benediction.

Then mechanically he turned back to confirm his observation. This time, knowing what he would see, he was not so horrified: his mind was cleared by the plain fact of what he was beholding. When at last he drew away his face was settled.

He was a man who thought quickly—thank the stars for that—and, once he thought, quick to spring to action. There was a peril poisoning over the earth. If it were to be voided there was not a second to lose in weighing up the possibilities.

He had been dreaming all his life. He had never thought that the climax was to be the very opposite of what he hoped for. In his under mind he prayed for Dr. Robold—dead and gone forever. Were he only here to help him!

He seized a piece of paper. Over its white face he ran a mass of computations. He worked like lightning; his fingers plying and his mind keyed to the pin-point of genius. Not one thing did he overlook in his calculation. If the earth had a chance he would find it.

There are always possibilities. He was working out the odds of the greatest race since creation. While the whole world slept, while the uncounted millions lay down in fond security, Charley Huyck there in the lonely room on the desert drew out their figured odds to the point of infinity.

"Just one chance in a million."

He was going to take it. The words were not out of his mouth before his long legs were leaping down the stairway. In the flash of seconds his mind was rushing into clear action. He had had years of dreaming; all his years of study and tutelage under Robold gave him just the training for such a disaster.

But he needed time. Time! Time! Why was it so precious? He must get to his own mountain. In six jumps he was in the office.

It was empty. The professor had not returned. He thought rather grimly and fleetingly of their conversation a few minutes before; what would Williams think now of science and consciousness? He picked up the telephone receiver. While he waited he saw out of the corner of his eye the car in the driveway. It was—

"Hello. The professor? What? Gone down to town? No! Well, say, this is Charley!!—he was watching the car in front of the building. "Say, hello—tell him I have gone home, home! H-o-m-e to Colorado— to Colorado, yes,—to the mountain—the m-o-u-n-t-a-i-n. Oh, never mind—I'll leave a note.

He clamped down the receiver. On the desk he scrawled on a piece of paper:

Ed:
"Look these up. I'm bound for the mountain. No time to explain. There's a car outside. Stay with the lens. Don't leave it. If the earth goes up you will know that I have not reached the mountain."

Beside the note he placed one of the maps that he had in his pocket—with his pencil drew a black cross just above the center. Under the map were a number of computations.

It is interesting to note that in the stress of the great critical moment he forgot the professor's title. It was a good thing. When Williams read it he recognized the significance. All through their life in crucial moments he had been "Ed." to Charley.

But the note was all he was destined to find. A brisk wind was blowing. By a strange balance of fate the same movement that let Huyck out of the building ushered in the wind and upset the calculation.

It was a little thing, but it was enough to keep all the world in ignorance and despair. The eddy whisking in through the door picked up the precious map, poised it like a tiny plane, and dropped it nearly behind a bookcase.

CHAPTER VI

A Race to Save the World

HUYCK was working in a straight line. Almost before his last words on the phone were spoken he had requisitioned that automobile outside; whether money or talk, faith or force, he was going to have it. The hum of the motor sounded in his ears as he ran down the steps. He was hatless and in his shirt-sleeves. The driver was just putting some tools in the car. With one jump Charley had him by the collar.

"Five thousand dollars if you can get me to Robold Mountain in twenty hours."

The very suddenness of the rush caught the man by surprise and lured him against the car, turning him half around. Charley found himself gazing into dull brown eyes and sardonic laughter: a long, thin nose and lips drooped at the corners, then as suddenly tipping up—a queer creature, half devil, half laughter, and all fun.

"Easy, Charley, easy! How much did you say? Whisper it."

It was Bob Winters. Bob Winters and his car. And waiting. Surely no twist of fortune could have been greater. He was a college chum of Huyek's and of the professor's. If there was one man that could make the run in the time allotted, Bob was he. But Huyek was impersonal. With the burden on his mind he thought of naught but his destination.

"Ten thousand!" he shouted.

The man held back his head. Huyek was far too serious to appreciate mischief. But not the man.

"Charley Huyek, of all men. Did young Lochinvar come out of the West? How much did you say? This desert air and the dust, 'tis hard on the hearing. She must be a young, fair maiden. Ten thousand."

"Twenty thousand. Thirty thousand. Damnation, man, you can have the mountain. Into the car."

By sheer subjective strength he forced the other into the machine. It was not until they were shooting out of the grounds on two wheels that he realized that the man was Bob Winters. Still the workings of fate.

The madcap and wild Bob of the races! Surely Destiny was on the job. The challenge of speed and the premium. At the opportune moment before disaster the two men were brought together. Minutes weighed up with centuries and hours outbalanced millenniums. The whole world slept; little did it dream that its very life was riding north with these two men into the midnight.

Into the midnight! The great car, the pride of Winter's heart, leaped between the pillars. At the very outset, madcap that he was, he sent her into seventy miles an hour; they fairly jumped off the hill into the village. At a full

seventy-five he took the curve; she skidded, sheered half around and swept on.

For an instant Charley held his breath. But the master hand held her; she steadied, straightened, and shot out into the desert. Above the whirl of the motor, flying dust and blurring what-not, Charley got the tones of his companion's voice. He had heard the words somewhere in history.

"Keep your seat, Mr. Greeley. Keep your seat!"

The moon was now far up over the mountain, the whole desert was bathed in a mellow twilight; in the distance the mountains brooded like an uncertain slumbering cloud bank. They were headed straight to the northward; though there was a better road round about, Winters had chosen the hard, rocky bee-line to the mountain.

He knew Huyek and his reputation; when Charley offered thirty thousand for a twenty-hour drive it was not mere byplay. He had happened in at the observatory to drop in on Williams on his way to the coast. They had been classmates; likewise he and Charley.

When the excited man out of the observatory had seized him by the collar, Winters merely had laughed. He was the speed king. The three boys who had gone to school were now playing with the destiny of the earth. But only Huyek knew it.

Winters wondered. Through miles and miles of fleeting sagebrush, cacti and sand and desolation, he rolled over the problem. Steady as a rock, slightly stooped, grim and as certain as steel he held to the north. Charley Huyek by his side, hatless, coatless, his hair dancing to the wind, all impatience. Why was it? Surely a man even for death would have time to get his hat.

The whole thing spelled speed to Bob Winters; perhaps it was the infusion of spirit or the intensity of his companion; but the thrill ran into his vitals. Thirty thousand dollars—for a stake like that—what was the balance? He had been called Wild Bob for his daring; some had called him insane; on this night his insanity was enchantment.

It was wild; the lee of the giant roadster a whirling shower of gravel: into the darkness, into the night the car fought over the distance. The terrific momentum and the friction of the air fought in their faces; Huyek's face was unprotected: in no time his lips were cracked, and long before they had crossed the level his whole face was bleeding.

But he heeded it not. He only knew that they were moving; that slowly, minute by minute, they were cutting down the odds that bore disaster. In his mind a maze of figures; the terrible sight he had seen in the telescope and the thing impending. Why had he kept his secret?

Over and again he impeached himself and Dr. Robold. It had come to this. The whole world sleeping and only himself to save it. Oh, for a few minutes, for one short moment! Would he get it?

At last they reached the mountains. A rough, rocky road, and but little traveled. Happily Winters had made it once before, and knew it. He took it with every bit of speed they could stand, but even at that it was diminished to a minimum.

For hours they fought over grade and gulches, dry washouts and boulders. It was dawn, and the sky was growing pink when they rode down again upon the level. It was here that they ran across their first trouble; and it was here that Winters began to realize vaguely what a race they might be running.

The particular level which they had entered was an elbow of the desert projecting into the mountains just below a massive, newly constructed dam. The reservoir had but lately been filled, and all was being put in readiness for the dedication.

An immense sheet of water extending far back into the mountains—it was intended before long to transform the

desert into a garden. Below, in the valley, was a town, already the center of a prosperous irrigation settlement; but soon, with the added area, to become a flourishing city. The elbow, where they struck it, was perhaps twenty miles across. Their northward path would take them just outside the tip where the foothills of the opposite mountain chain melted into the desert. Without ado Winters put on all speed and plunged across the sands. And then:

It was much like winking; but for all that something far more impressive. To Winters, on the left-hand of the car and with the east on the right hand, it was much as if the sun had suddenly leaped up and as suddenly plumped down behind the horizon—a vast vividness of scintillating opalescence: an azure, flaming diamond shot by a million fire points.

Instantaneous and beautiful. In the pale dawn of the desert air its wonder and color were beyond all beauty. Winters caught it out of the corner of his eye; it was so instantaneous and so illusive that he was not certain. Instinctively he looked to his companion.

But Charley, too, had seen it. His attitude of waiting and hoping was vigorized into vivid action. He knew just what it was. With one hand he clutched Winters and fairly shouted.

"On, on, Bob! On, as you value your life. Put into her every bit of speed you have got."

At the same instant, at the same breath came a roar that was not to be forgotten; crunching, rolling, terrible—like the mountain moving.

Bob knew it. It was the dam. Something had broken it. To the east the great wall of water fallout of the mountains! A beautiful sight and terrible; a relentless glassy roller fringed along its base by a lace of racing foam. The upper part was as smooth as crystal; the stored-up waters of the mountain moving out compactly. The man thought of the little town below and its peril. But Huyck thought also. He shouted in Winters' ear:

"Never mind the town. Keep straight north. Over yonder to the point of the water. The town will have to drown."

It was inexorable; there was no pity; the very strength and purpose of the command drove into the other's understanding. Dimly now he realized that they were really running a race against time. Winters was a daredevil; the very catastrophe sent a thrill of exultation through him. It was the climax, the great moment of his life, to be driving at a hundred miles an hour under that wall of water.

The roar was terrible. Before they were half across it seemed to the two men that the very sound would drown them. There was nothing in the world but pandemonium. The strange flash was forgotten in the terror of the living wall that was reaching out to engulf them. Like insects they whizzed in the open face of the deluge. When they had reached the tip they were so close that the out-running fringe of the surf was at their wheels.

Around the point with the wide open plain before them. With the flood behind them it was nothing to outrun it. The waters with a wider stretch spread out. In a few moments they had left all behind them.

But Winters wondered; what was the strange flash of evanescent beauty? He knew this dam and its construction; to outlast the centuries. It had been whiffed in a second. It was not lightning. He had heard no sound other than the rush of the waters. He looked to his companion.

Huyck nodded.

"That's the thing we are racing. We have only a few hours. Can we make it?"

Bob had thought that he was getting all the speed possible out of his motor. What it yielded from that moment on was a revelation.

It is not safe and hardly possible to be driving at such speed on the desert. Only the best car and a firm roadway can stand it. A sudden rut, squirrel hole, or pocket of sand, is as good as destruction. They rushed on till noon.

Not even Winters, with all his alertness, could avoid it. Perhaps he was weary. The tedious hours, the racking speed had worn him to exhaustion. They had ceased to individualize, their way a blur, a nightmare of speed and distance.

It came suddenly, a blind barranca—one of those sunken, useless channels that are death to the unwary. No warning.

It was over just that quickly. A mere flash of consciousness plus a sensation of flying. Two men broken on the sands and the great, beautiful roadster a twisted ruin.

CHAPTER VII

A Riven Continent

BUT back to the world. No one knew about Charley Huyck nor what was occurring on the desert. Even if we had it would have been impossible to construe connection.

After the news out of Oakland, and the destruction of Mt. Heckla, we were far too appalled. The whole thing was beyond us. Not even the scientists with all their data could find one thing to work on. The wires of the world buzzed with wonder and with panic. We were civilized. It is really strange how quickly, in spite of our boasted powers, we revert to the primitive.

Superstition cannot die. Where was no explanation must be a miracle. The thing had been repeated. When would it strike again. And where?

There was not long to wait. But this time the stroke was of far more consequence and of far more terror. The sheer might of the thing shook the earth. Not a man or government that would not resign in the face of such destruction.

It was omnipotent. A whole continent had been riven. It would be impossible to give description of such catastrophe; no pen can tell it any more than it could describe the creation. We can only follow in its path.

On the morning after the first catastrophe, at eight o'clock, just south of the little city of Santa Cruz, on the north shore of the Bay of Monterey, the same light and the same, though not quite the same, instantaneousness. Those who beheld it report a vast ball of azure blue and opalescent fire and motion; a strange sensation of vitalized vibration; of personified living force. In shape like a marble, as round as a full moon in its glory, but of infinitely more beauty.

It came from nowhere; neither from above the earth nor below it. Seeming to leap out of nothing, it glided or rather vanished to the eastward. Still the effect of winking, though this time, perhaps from a distanced focus, more vivid. A dot or marble, like a full moon, burning, opal, soaring to the eastward.

And instantaneous. Gone as soon as it was come; noiseless and of phantom beauty; like a finger of the Omnipotent tracing across the world, and as terrible. The human mind had never conceived a thing so vast.

Beginning at the sands of the ocean the whole country had vanished; a chasm twelve miles wide and of unknown depth running straight to the eastward. Where had been farms and homes was nothing; the mountains had been seared like butter. Straight as an arrow.

Then the roar of the deluge. The waters of the Pacific breaking through its sands and rolling into the Gulf of Mexico. That there was no heat was evidenced by the fact that there was no steam. The thing could not be internal. Yet what was it?

One can only conceive in figures. From the shores of Santa Cruz to the Atlantic—a few seconds; then out into the eastern ocean straight out into the Sea of the Sargasso. A great gulf riven straight across the face of North America.

The path seemed to follow the sun; it bore to the eastward with a slight southern deviation. The mountains it cut like cheese. Passing just north of Fresno it seared through the gigantic Sierras halfway between the Yosemite and Mt. Whitney, through the great desert to southern Nevada, thence across northern Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, entering the Atlantic at a point half-way between Brunswick and Jacksonville. A great canal twelve miles in width linking the oceans. A cataclysmic blessing. Today, with thousands of ships bearing freight over its water, we can bless that part of the disaster.

But there was more to come. So far the miracle had been sporadic. Whatever had been its force it had been fatal only on point and occasion. In a way it had been local. The deadly atmospheric combination of its aftermath was invariable in its recession. There was no suffering. The death that it dealt was the death of obliteration. But now it entered on another stage.

The world is one vast ball, and, though large, still a very small place to live in. There are few of us, perhaps, who look upon it, or even stop to think of it, as a living being. Yet it is just that. It has its currents, life, pulse, and its fevers; it is coordinate; a million things such as the great streams of the ocean, the swirls of the atmosphere, make it a place to live in. And we are conscious only, or mostly, through disaster.

A strange thing happened.

The great opal like a mountain of fire had riven across the continent. From the beginning and with each succession the thing was magnified. But it was not until it had struck the waters of the Atlantic that we became aware of its full potency and its fatality.

The earth quivered at the shock, and man stood on his toes in terror. In twenty-four hours our civilization was literally falling to pieces. We were powerful with the forces that we understood, but against this that had been literally ripped from the unknown we were insignificant. The whole world was frozen. Let us see.

Into the Atlantic! The transition. Hitherto silence. But now the roar of ten thousand million Niagaras, the waters of the ocean rolling, catapulting, roaring into the gulf that had been seared in its bosom. The Gulf Stream cut in two, the currents that tempered our civilization sheared in a second. Straight into the Sargasso Sea. The great opal, liquid fire, luminiscent, a ball like the setting sun, lay poised upon the ocean. It was the end of the earth!

What was this thing? The whole world knew of it in a second. And not a one could tell. In less than forty hours after its first appearance in Oakland it had consumed a mountain, riven a continent, and was drinking up an ocean. The tangled sea of the Sargasso, dead calm for ages, was a cataract; a swirling torrent of maddened waters rushed to the opal—and disappeared.

It was hellish and out of madness; as beautiful as it was uncanny. The opal high as the Himalayas brooding upon the water; its myriad colors blending, winking in a phantasm of iridescence. The beauty of its light could be seen a thousand miles. A thing out of mystery and out of forces. We had discovered many things and knew much; but had guessed no such thing as this. It was vampirish, and it was literally drinking up the earth.

Consequences were immediate. The point of contact was fifty miles across, the waters of the Atlantic with one accord turned to the magnet. The Gulf Stream veered straight from its course and out across the Atlantic. The icy currents from the poles freed from the warmer barrier

descended along the coasts and thence out into the Sargasso Sea. The temperature of the temperate zone dipped below the point of a blizzard.

The first word came out of London. Freezing! And in July! The fruit and entire harvest of northern Europe destroyed. Olympic games at Copenhagen postponed by a foot of snow. The river Seine frozen. Snow falling in New York. Crops nipped with frost as far south as Cape Hatteras.

A fleet of airplanes was despatched from the United States and another from the west coast of Africa. Not half of them returned. Those that did reported even more disaster. The reports that were handed in were appalling. They had sailed straight on. It was like flying into the sun; the vividness of the opalescence was blinding, rising for miles above them alluring, drawing and unholy, and of a beauty that was terror.

Only the tardy had escaped. It even drew their motors, it was like gravity suddenly become vitalized and conscious. Thousands of machines vaulted into the opalescence. From those ahead hopelessly drawn and powerless came back the warning. But hundreds could not escape.

"Back," came the wireless. "Do not come too close. The thing is a magnet. Turn back before too late. Against this man is insignificant."

Then like gnats flitting into fire they vanished into the opalescence.

The others turned back. The whole world freezing, shuddered in horror. A great vampire was brooding over the earth. The greatness that man had attained to was nothing. Civilization was tottering in a day. We were hopeless.

Then came the last revelation; the truth and verity of the disaster and the threatened climax. The water level of all the coast had gone down. Vast ebb tides had gone out not to return. Stretches of sand where had been surf extended far out into the sea. Then the truth! The thing, whatever it was, was drinking up the ocean.

CHARTER VIII

The Man Who Saved the Earth

IT was tragic; grim, terrible, cosmic. Out of nowhere had come this thing that was eating up the earth. Not a thing out of all our science had there been to warn us; not a word from all our wise men. We who had built up our civilization, piece by piece, were after all but insects.

We were going out in a maze of beauty into the infinity whence we came. Hour by hour the great orb of opalescence grew in splendor; the effect and the beauty of its lure spread about the earth; thrilling, vibrant like suppressed music. The old earth helpless. Was it possible that out of her bosom she could not pluck one intelligence to save her? Was there not one law—no answer?

Out on the desert with his face to the sun lay the answer. Though almost hopeless there was still some time and enough of near-miracle to save us. A limping fate in the shape of two Indians and a battered runabout at the last moment.

Little did the two red men know the value of the two men found that day on the desert. To them the debris of the mighty car and the prone bodies told enough of the story. They were Samaritans; but there are many ages to bless them.

As it was there were many hours lost. Without this loss there would have been thousands spared and an almost immeasurable amount of disaster. But we have still to be thankful. Charley Huyck was still living.

He had been stunned; battered, bruised, and unconscious; but he had not been injured vitally. There was still

enough left of him to drag himself to the old runabout and call for Winters. His companion, as it happened, was in even better shape than himself, and waiting. We do not know how they talked the red men out of their relic—whether by coaxing, by threat, or by force.

Straight north. Two men battered, worn, bruised, but steadfast, bearing in that limping old motorcar the destiny of the earth. Fate was still on the job, but badly crippled.

They had lost many precious hours. Winters had forfeited his right to the thirty thousand. He did not care. He understood vaguely that there was a stake over and above all money. Huyck said nothing; he was too maimed and too much below will-power to think of speaking. What had occurred during the many hours of their unconsciousness was unknown to them. It was not until they came sheer upon the gulf that had been riven straight across the continent that the awful truth dawned on them.

To Winters it was terrible. The mere glimpse of that blackened chasm was terror. It was bottomless; so deep that its depths were cloudy; the misty haze of its uncertain shadows was akin to chaos. He understood vaguely that it was related to that terrible thing they had beheld in the morning. It was not the power of man. Some force had been loosened which was ripping the earth to its vitals. Across the terror of the chasm he made out the dim outlines of the opposite wall. A full twelve miles across.

For a moment the sight overcame even Huyck himself. Full well he knew; but knowing, as he did, the full fact of the miracle was even more than he expected. His long years under Robold, his scientific imagination had given him comprehension. Not puny steam, nor weird electricity, but force, kinetics—out of the universe.

He knew. But knowing as he did, he was overcome by the horror. Such a thing turned loose upon the earth! He had lost many hours; he had but a few hours remaining. The thought gave him sudden energy. He seized Winters by the arm.

"To the first town, Bob. To the first town—an aerodome."

There was speed in that motor for all its decades. Winters turned about and shot out in a lateral course parallel to the great chasm. But for all his speed he could not keep back his question.

"In the name of Heaven, Charley, what did it? What is it?"

Came the answer; and it drove the lust of all speed through Winters:

"Bob," said Charley, "it is the end of the world—if we don't make it. But a few hours left. We must have an airplane. I must make the mountain."

It was enough for Wild Bob. He settled down. It was only an old runabout; but he could get speed out of a wheelbarrow. He had never driven a race like this. Just once did he speak. The words were characteristic.

"A world's record, Charley. And we're going to win. Just watch us."

And they did.

There was no time lost in the change. The mere fact of Huyck's name, his appearance and the manner of his arrival was enough. For the last hours messages had been pouring in at every post in the Rocky Mountains for Charley Huyck. After the failure of all others many thousands had thought of him.

Even the government, unappreciative before, had awakened to a belated and almost frantic eagerness. Orders were out that everything, no matter what, was to be at his disposal. He had been regarded as visionary; but in the face of what had occurred, visions were now the most practical things for mankind. Besides, Professor Williams had sent out to the world the strange portent of Huyck's

note. For years there had been mystery on that mountain. Could it be?

Unfortunately we cannot give it the description we would like to give. Few men outside of the regular employees have ever been to the Mountain of Robold. From the very first, owing perhaps to the great forces stored, and the danger of carelessness, strangers and visitors had been barred. Then, too, the secrecy of Dr. Robold—and the respect of his successor. But we do know that the burning glass had grown into the mountain.

Bob Winters and the aviator are the only ones to tell us; the employees, one and all, chose to remain. The cataclysm that followed destroyed the work of Huyck and Robold—but not until it had served the greatest deed that ever came out of the minds of men. And had it not been for Huyck's insistence we would not have even the account that we are giving.

It was he who insisted, nay, begged, that his companions return while there was yet a chance. Full well he knew. Out of the universe, out of space he had coaxed the forces that would burn up the earth. The great ball of luminous opalescence, and the diminishing ocean!

There was but one answer. Through the imaginative genius of Robold and Huyck, fate had worked up to the moment. The lad and the burning glass had grown to Archimedes.

What happened?

The plane neared the Mountain of Robold. The great bald summit and the four enormous globes of crystal. At least we so assume. We have Winters' word and that of the aviator that they were of the appearance of glass. Perhaps they were not; but we can assume it for description. So enormous that were they set upon a plain they would have overtopped the highest building ever constructed; though on the height of the mountain, and in its contrast, they were not much more than golf balls.

It was not their size but their effect that was startling. They were alive. At least that is what we have from Winters. Living, luminous, burning, twisting within with a thousand blending, iridescent beautiful colors. Not like electricity but something infinitely more powerful. Great mysterious magnets that Huyck had charged out of chaos. Glowing with the softest light; the whole mountain brightened as in a dream, and the town of Robold and its base lit up with a beauty that was past beholding.

It was new to Winters. The great buildings and the enormous machinery. Engines of strangest pattern, driven by forces that the rest of the world had not thought of. Not a sound; the whole works a complicated mass covering a hundred acres, driving with a silence that was magic. Not a whirl nor friction. Like a living composite body pulsing and breathing the strange and mysterious force that had been evolved from Huyck's theory of kinetics. The four great steel conduits running from the globes down the side of the mountain. In the center, at a point midway between the globes, a massive steel needle hung on a pivot and pointed directly at the sun.

Winters and the aviator noted it and wondered. From the lower end of the needle was pouring a luminous stream of pale-blue opalescence, a stream much like a liquid, and of an unholy radiance. But it was not a liquid, nor fire, nor anything seen by man before.

It was force. We have no better description than the apt phrase of Winters. Charley Huyck was milking the sun, as it dropped from the end of the four living streams to the four globes that took it into storage. The four great, wonderful living globes; the four batteries; the very sight of their imprisoned beauty and power was magnetic.

The genius of Huyck and Robold! Nobody but the wildest dreamers would have conceived it. The life of the sun. And captive to man; at his will and volition. And in

the next few minutes we were to lose it all! But in losing it we were to save ourselves. It was fate and nothing else.

There was but one thing more upon the mountain—the observatory and another needle apparently idle; but with a point much like a gigantic phonograph needle. It rose square out of the observatory, and to Winters it gave an impression of a strange gun, or some implement for sighting.

That was all. Coming with the speed that they were making, the airmen had no time for further investigation. But even this is comprehensive. Minus the force. If we only knew more about that or even its theory we might perhaps reconstruct the work of Charley Huyck and Dr. Robold.

They made the landing. Winters, with his nature, would be in at the finish; but Charley would not have it.

"It is death, Bob," he said. "You have a wife and babies. Go back to the world. Go back with all the speed you can get out of your motors. Get as far away as you can before the end comes."

With that he bade them a sad farewell. It was the last spoken word that the outside world had from Charley Huyck.

The last seen of him he was running up the steps of his office. As they soared away and looked back they could see men, the employees, scurrying about in frantic haste to their respective posts and stations. What was it all about? Little did the two aviators know. Little did they dream that it was the deciding stroke.

CHAPTER IX

The Most Terrific Moment in History

STILL the great ball of Opalescence brooding over the Sargasso. Europe now was frozen, and though it was midsummer had gone into winter quarters. The Straits of Dover were no more. The waters had receded and one could walk, if careful, dryshod from the shores of France to the chalk cliffs of England. The Straits of Gibraltar had dried up. The Mediterranean completely land locked was cut off forever from the tides of the mother ocean.

The whole world going dry; not in ethics, but in reality. The great Vampire, luminous, beautiful beyond all ken and thinking, drinking up our life-blood. The Atlantic a vast whirlpool.

A strange frenzy had fallen over mankind: men fought in the streets and died in madness. It was fear of the Great Unknown, and hysteria. At such a moment the veil of civilization was torn to tatters. Man was reverting to the primeval.

Then came the word from Charley Huyck; flashing and repeating to every clime and nation. In its assurance it was almost as miraculous as the Vampire itself. For man had surrendered.

TO THE PEOPLE OF THE WORLD:

The strange and terrible Opalescence which, for the past seventy hours, has been playing havoc with the world, is not miracle, nor of the supernatural, but a mere manifestation and result of the application of celestial kinetics. Such a thing always was and always will be possible where there is intelligence to control and harness the forces that lie about us. Space is not space exactly, but an infinite cistern of unknown laws and forces. We may control certain laws on earth, but until we reach out farther we are but playthings.

Man is the intelligence of the earth. The time will come when he must be the intelligence of a great deal of space as well. At the present time you are merely fortunate and a victim of a kind fate. That I am the instrument of the

earth's salvation is merely chance. The real man is Dr. Robold. When he picked me up on the streets I had no idea that the sequence of time would drift to this moment. He took me into his work and taught me.

Because he was sensitive and was laughed at, we worked in secret. And since his death, and out of respect to his memory, I have continued in the same manner. But I have written down everything, all the laws, computations, formulas—everything; and I am now willing it to mankind.

Robold had a theory of kinetics. It was strange at first and a thing to laugh at; but he reduced it to laws as potent and as inexorable as the laws of gravitation.

The luminous Opalescence that has almost destroyed us is but one of its minor manifestations. It is a message of sinister intelligence; for back of it all is an Intelligence. Yet it is not all sinister. It is self-preservation. The time is coming when eons of ages from now our own man will be forced to employ just such a weapon for his own preservation. Either that or we shall die of thirst and agony.

Let me ask you to remember now, that whatever you have suffered, you have saved a world. I shall now save you and the earth.

In the vaults you will find everything. All the knowledge and discoveries of the great Dr. Robold, plus a few minor findings by myself.

And now I bid you farewell. You shall soon be free.

CHARLEY HUYCK.

A strange message. Spoken over the wireless and flashed to every clime, it roused and revived the hope of mankind. Who was this Charley Huyck? Uncounted millions of men had never heard his name; there were but few, very few who had.

A message out of nowhere and of very dubious and doubtful explanation. Celestial kinetics! Undoubtedly. But the words explained nothing. However, man was ready to accept anything, so long as it saved him.

For a more lucid explanation we must go back to the Arizona observatory and Professor Ed. Williams. And a strange one it was truly; a certain proof that consciousness is more potent, far more so than mere material; also that many laws of our astronomers are very apt to be overturned in spite of their mathematics.

Charley Huyck was right. You cannot measure intelligence with a yard-stick. Mathematics do not lie; but when applied to consciousness they are very likely to kick backward. That is precisely what had happened.

The suddenness of Huyck's departure had puzzled Professor Williams; that, and the note which he found upon the table. It was not like Charley to go off so in the stress of a moment. He had not even taken the time to get his hat and coat. Surely something was amiss.

He read the note carefully, and with a deal of wonder. "Look these up. Keep by the lens. If the world goes up you will know I have not reached the mountain."

What did he mean? Besides, there was no data for him to work on. He did not know that an errant breeze had plumped the information behind the bookcase. Nevertheless he went into the observatory, and for the balance of the night stuck by the lens.

Now there are uncounted millions of stars in the sky. Williams had nothing to go by. A needle in the hay-stack were an easy task compared with the one that he was allotted. The flaming mystery, whatever it was that Huyck had seen, was not caught by the professor. Still, he wondered. "If the world goes up you will know I have not reached the mountain." What was the meaning?

But he was not worried. The professor loved Huyck as a visionary and smiled not a little at his delightful fancies.

Doubtless this was one of them. It was not until the news came flashing out of Oakland that he began to take it seriously. Then followed the disappearance of Mount Heckla. "If the world goes up"—it began to look as if the words had meaning.

There was a frantic professor during the next few days. When he was not with the lens he was flashing out messages to the world for Charley Huyck. He did not know that Huyck was lying unconscious and almost dead upon the desert. That the world was coming to catastrophe he knew full well; but where was the man to save it? And most of all, what had his friend meant by the words, "look these up?"

Surely there must be some further information. Through the long, long hours he stayed with the lens and waited. And he found nothing.

It was three days. Who will ever forget them? Surely not Professor Williams. He was sweating blood. The whole world was going to pieces without a trace of an explanation. All the mathematics, all the accumulations of the ages had availed for nothing. Charley Huyck held the secret. It was in the stars, and not an astronomer could find it.

But with the seventeenth hour came the turn of fortune. The professor was passing through the office. The door was open, and the same fitful wind which had played the original prank was now just as fitfully performing restitution. Williams noticed a piece of paper protruding from the back of the bookcase and fluttering in the breeze. He picked it up. The first words that he saw were in the handwriting of Charley Huyck. He read:

"In the last extremity—in the last phase when there is no longer any water on the earth; when even the oxygen of the atmospheric envelope has been reduced to a minimum, man, or whatever form of intelligence is then upon the earth, must go back to the laws which governed his forebears. Necessity must ever be the law of evolution. There will be no water upon the earth, but there will be an unlimited quantity elsewhere.

"By that time, for instance, the great planet, Jupiter, will be in just a convenient state for exploitation. Gaseous now, it will be, by that time, in just about the stage when the steam and water are condensing into ocean. Eons of millions of years away in the days of dire necessity. By that time the intelligence and consciousness of the earth will have grown equal to the task.

"It is a thing to laugh at (perhaps) just at present. But when we consider the ratio of man's advance in the last hundred years, what will it be in a billion? Not all the laws of the universe have been discovered, by any means. At present we know nothing. Who can tell?

"Aye, who can tell? Perhaps we ourselves have in store the fate we would mete out to another. We have a very dangerous neighbor close beside us. Mars is in dire straits for water. And we know there is life on Mars and intelligence! The very fact on its face proclaims it. The oceans have dried up; the only way they have of holding life is by bringing their water from the polar snow-caps. Their canals pronounce an advanced state of cooperative intelligence; there is life upon Mars and in an advanced stage of evolution.

"But how far advanced? It is a small planet, and consequently eons of ages in advance of the earth's evolution. In the nature of things Mars cooled off quickly, and life was possible there while the earth was yet a gaseous mass. She has gone to her maturity and into her retrogression; she is approaching her end. She has had less time to produce intelligence than intelligence will have—in the end—upon the earth.

"How far has this intelligence progressed? That is the question. Nature is a slow worker. It took eons of

ages to put life upon the earth; it took eons of more ages to make this life conscious. How far will it go? How far has it gone on Mars?"

That was as far as the comments went. The professor dropped his eyes to the rest of the paper. It was a map of the face of Mars, and across its center was a black cross scratched by the dull point of a soft pencil.

He knew the face of Mars. It was the Ascræus Lucus. The oasis at the juncture of a series of canals running much like the spokes of a wheel. The great Uranium and Alander Canals coming in at about right angles.

In two jumps the professor was in the observatory with the great lens swung to focus. It was the great moment out of his life time, and the strangest and most eager moment, perhaps, ever lived by any astronomer. His fingers fairly twitched with tension. There before his view was the full face of our Martian neighbor!

But was it? He gasped out a breath of startled exclamation. Was it Mars that he gazed at; the whole face, the whole thing had been changed before him.

Mars has ever been red. Viewed through the telescope it has had the most beautiful tinge imaginable, red ochre, the weird tinge of the desert in sunset. The color of enchantment and of hell!

For it is so. We know that for ages and ages the planet has been burning up; that life was possible only in the dry sea-bottoms and under irrigation. The rest, where the continents once were, was blazing desert. The redness, the beauty, the enchantment that we so admired was burning hell.

All this had changed.

Instead of this was a beautiful shade of iridescent green. The red was gone forever. The great planet standing in the heavens had grown into infinite glory. Like the great Dog Star transplanted.

The professor sought out the Ascræus Lucus. It was hard to find. The whole face had been transfigured; where had been canals, were now the beautiful sheen of green and verdure. He realized what he was beholding; what he had never dreamed of seeing; the seas of Mars filled up.

With the stolen oceans our grim neighbor had come back to youth. But how had it been done. It was horror for our world. The great luminescent ball of Opalescence! Europe frozen and New York a mass of ice. It was the earth's destruction. How long could the thing keep up; and whence did it come? What was it?

He sought for the Ascræus Lucus. And he beheld a strange sight. At the very spot where should have been the juncture of the canals he caught what at first looked like a pin-point flame, a strange twinkling light with flitting glow of Opalescence. He watched it, and he wondered. It seemed to the professor to grow; and he noticed that the green about it was of different color. It was winking, like a great force, and much as if alive; baneful.

It was what Charley Huyck had seen. The professor thought of Charley. He had hurried to the mountain. What could Huyck, a mere man, do against a thing like this? There was naught to do but sit and watch it drink of our life-blood and then—

It was the message, the strange assurance that Huyck was flashing over the world. There was no lack of confidence in the words he was speaking. "Celestial Kinetics," so that was the answer! Certainly it must be so with the truth before him. Williams was a doubter no longer. And Charley Huyck could save them. The man he had humored. Eagerly he waited and stuck by the lens. The whole world waited.

It was perhaps the most terrific moment since creation. To describe it would be like describing doomsday. We all of us went through it, and we all of us thought the end had come: that the earth was torn to atoms and to chaos.

The State of Colorado was lured with a red light of terror; for a thousand miles the flame shot above the earth and into space. If ever spirit went out in glory that spirit was Charley Huyek! He had come to the moment and to Archimedes. The whole world rocked to the recoil. Compared to it the mightiest earthquake was but a tender shiver. The consciousness of the earth had spoken!

The professor was knocked upon the floor. He knew not what had happened. Out of the windows and to the north the flame of Colorado, like the whole world going up. It was the last moment. But he was a scientist to the end. He had sprained his ankle and his face was bleeding; but for all that he struggled, fought his way to the telescope. And he saw.

The great planet with its sinister, baleful, wicked light in the center, and another light vastly larger covering up half of Mars. What was it? It was moving. The truth set him almost to shouting.

It was the answer of Charley Huyek and of the world. The light grew smaller, smaller, and almost to a pin-point on its way to Mars.

The real climax was in silence. And of all the world only Professor Williams beheld it. The two lights coalesced and spread out; what it was on Mars, we do not know.

But in a few moments all was gone. Only the green of the Martian sea winked in the sunlight. The luminous opal was gone from the Sargasso. The ocean lay in peace.

It was a terrible three days. Had it not been for the work of Robold and Huyek life would have been destroyed. The pity of it that all their discoveries have gone with them. Not even Charley realized how terrific was the force he was about to loosen.

He had carefully locked everything in vaults for a safe delivery to man. He had expected death, but not the cataclysm. The whole of Mount Robold was shorn away; in its place we have a lake fifty miles in diameter.

So much for celestial kinetics.

And we look to a green and beautiful Mars. We hold no enmity. It was but the law of self-preservation. Let us hope they have enough water; and that their seas will hold. We don't blame them, and we don't blame ourselves, either for that matter. We need what we have, and we hope to keep it.

THE END



The PEOPLE of the PIT

By A. Merritt

Author of "The Moon Pool," "The Face in the Abyss," etc.



"I was, in movement and sound, one with these nameless thingsI saw the things under the lights—great transparent, snail-like bodies—dozens of waving tentacles stretching from them....they were like specters of inconceivable monstrous things!....they did not crawl or walk—they floated!"



NORTH of us a shaft of light shot half way to the zenith. It came from behind the ragged mountain toward which we had been pushing all day. The beam drove up through a column of blue haze whose edges were marked as sharply as the rain that streams from the edges of a thunder cloud. It was like the flash of a searchlight through an azure mist and it cast no shadows.

As it struck upward the five summits were outlined hard and black, and we saw that the whole mountain was shaped like a hand. As the light silhouetted it, the gigantic fingers of the peaks seemed to stretch, the bulk that was the palm of the hand to push. It was exactly as though it moved to thrust something back. The shining beam held steady for a moment, then broke into myriads of tiny luminous globes that swung to and fro and dropped gently. They seemed to be searching.

The forest had become very still. Every wood noise held its breath. I felt the dogs pressing against my legs. They, too, were silent; but every muscle in their bodies trembled, their hair was stiff along their backs, and their eyes, fixed on the falling phosphorescent sparks, were filmed with the terror-glaze.

I looked at Starr Anderson. He was staring at the North where once more the beam had pulsed upward.

"The mountain shaped like a hand!" I spoke without moving my lips. My mouth was as dry as though Lao T'zai had poured his fear-dust down my throat.

"It is the mountain we've been looking for," he answered in the same tone.

"But that light—what is it? Not the aurora surely," I said.

"Whoever heard of an aurora at this time of the year?"

He voiced the thought that was in my own mind.

"It makes me think something is being hunted up there," he said. "That the lights are seeking—an unholy sort of hunt—it's well for us to be out of range."

"The mountain seems to move each time the shaft shoots up," I said. "What's it keeping back, Starr? It makes me think of the frozen hand of cloud that Shan Nadour set before the gate of Ghouls to keep them in the lairs that Eblis cut for them."

He raised a hand, listening.

From the north and high overhead there came a whispering. It was not the rustling of the aurora, that rushing crackling sound like ghosts of the winds that blew at Creation racing through the skeleton leaves of ancient trees that sheltered Lilith. This whispering held in it a demand. It was eager. It called us to come up where the beam was flashing. It—drew!

There was in it a note of inexorable insistence. It touched my heart with a thousand tiny fear-tipped fingers and it filled me with a vast longing to race on and merge myself in the light. It must have been so that Ulysses felt when he strained at the mast and strove to obey the crystal sweet singing of the sirens.

The whispering grew louder.

"What the hell is the matter with those dogs?" cried Starr Anderson savagely. "Look at them!"

The malemiuts, whining, were racing away toward the light. We saw them disappear among the trees. There came back to us a mournful howling. Then that too died away and left nothing but the insistent murmuring overhead.

The glade we had camped in looked straight to the North. We had reached, I suppose, three hundred miles

above the first great bend of the Kuskokwim toward the Yukon. Certainly we were in an untrodden part of the wilderness. We had pushed through from Dawson at the breaking of the spring, on a fair lead to a lost mountain between the five peaks of which, so the Athabaskan medicine man had told us, the gold streams out like putty from a clinched fist.

Not an Indian were we able to get to go with us. The land of the Hand Mountain was accursed, they said.

We had sighted a mountain the night before, its ragged top faintly outlined against a pulsing glow. And now by the light that had led us, we saw that it was the very place we had sought.

Anderson stiffened. Through the whispering had broken a curious pad—pad and a rustling. It sounded as though a small bear were moving toward us.

I threw a pile of wood on the fire, and as it blazed up, saw something break through the bushes. It walked on all fours, but it did not walk like a bear. All at once it flashed upon me—it was like a baby crawling upstairs. The forepaws lifted themselves in grotesquely infantile fashion. It was grotesque but it was—terrible. It drew closer. We reached for our guns—and dropped them. Suddenly we knew that this crawling thing was a man!

It was a man. Still with that high climbing pad—pad he swayed to the fire. He stopped.

"Safe," whispered the crawling man in a voice that was an echo of the whispering overhead. "Quite safe here. They can't get out of the blue, you know. They can't get you—unless you answer them—"

"He's mad," said Anderson, and then gently to this broken thing that had been a man; "You're all right—there's nothing after you."

"Don't answer them," repeated the crawling man, "the lights, I mean."

"The lights," I cried, startled even out of pity. "What are they?"

"The people of the pit!" he murmured.

He fell upon his side. We ran to him. Anderson knelt.

"God's love!" he cried. "Frank, look at this!"

He pointed to the hands. The wrists were covered with torn rags of a heavy shirt. The hands themselves were—stumps! The fingers had been bent into the palms and the flesh had been worn to the bone. They looked like the feet of a little black elephant! My eyes traveled down the body.

Around the waist was a heavy band of yellow metal. From it fell a ring and a dozen links of shining white chain!

"What is he? Where did he come from?" said Anderson. "Look, he's fast asleep—yet even in his sleep his arms try to climb and his feet draw themselves up one after the other! And his knees—

how in God's name was he ever able to move on them?"

It was even as he said. In the deep sleep that had come upon the crawler, arms and legs kept raising in a deliberate, dreadful climbing motion. It was as though they had a life of their own—they kept their movement independently of the motionless body. They were semaphoric motions. If you have ever stood at the back of a train and watched the semaphores rise and fall you will know exactly what I mean.

Abruptly the overhead whispering ceased. The shaft of light dropped and did not rise again. The crawling man became still. A gentle glow began to grow around us. The short Alaskan summer night was over. Anderson rubbed his eyes and turned me a haggard face.

***H**ERE is a "different" story by the well-known author, a story that deals with intelligences that seem almost incomprehensible to our minds. We have always maintained that it is possible to have intelligence in an envelope other than skin, flesh and blood.*

We are sure you will be greatly interested in this exceedingly clever story.

"Man!" he exclaimed. "You look as though you have been sick!"

"No more than you, Starr!" I said. "That was sheer, stark horror! What do you make of it all?"

"I'm thinking our only answer lies there," he answered, pointing to the figure that lay so motionless under the blankets we had thrown over him. "Whatever they were—that's what they were after. There was no aurora about those lights, Frank. It was like the flaring up of some queer hell the preacher folk never frightened us with."

"We'll go no further to-day," I said. "I wouldn't wake him up for all the gold that runs between the fingers of the five peaks—nor for all the devils that may be behind them."

The crawling man lay in a sleep as deep as the Styx. We bathed and bandaged the pads that had been his hands. Arms and legs were as rigid as though they were crutches. He did not move while we worked over him. He lay as he had fallen, the arms a trifle raised, the knees bent.

I began filing the band that ringed the sleeper's waist. It was gold, but it was like no gold I had ever handled. Pure gold is soft. This was soft too—but it had an unclean, viscid life of its own.

It clung to the file and I could have sworn that it writhed like a live thing when I cut into it. I gashed through it, bent it away from the body and hurled it away. It was—loathsome!

All that day the crawler slept. Darkness came and still he slept. But that night there was no shaft of blue haze from behind the peaks, no questioning globes of light, no whispering. Some spell of horror seemed withdrawn—but not far. Both Anderson and I felt that the menace was there, withdrawn perhaps, but waiting.

It was noon next day when the crawling man awoke. I jumped as the pleasant drawling voice sounded.

"How long have I slept?" he said. His pale blue eyes grew quizzical as I stared at him.

"A night—and almost two days," I said.

"Were there any lights up there last night? He nodded to the North eagerly. "Any whispering?"

"Neither," I answered. His head fell back and he stared up at the sky.

"They've given it up, then?" he said at last.

"Who have given it up?" asked Anderson.

And once more—"The people of the pit!" the crawling man answered.

We stared at him and again faintly I, for one, felt that queer, maddening desire that the lights had brought with them.

"The people of the pit," he repeated. "Things some god of evil made before the Flood and that somehow have escaped the good God's vengeance. They were calling me!" he added simply.

Anderson and I looked at each other, the same thought in both our minds.

"No," said the crawling man, reading what it was, "I'm not insane. Give me a very little to drink. I'm going to die soon. Will you take me as far South as you can before I die? And afterwards will you build a fire and burn me? I want to be in such shape that no devilish wile of theirs can drag my body to them. You'll do it when I've told you about them," he said as we hesitated.

He drank the brandy and water we lifted to his lips.

"Arms and legs quite dead," he said. "Dead as I'll be soon. Well, they did well for me. Now I'll tell you what's up there behind that hand. Hell!"

"Listen. My name is Stanton—Sinclair Stanton. Class 1900, Yale. Explorer. I started away from Dawson last year to hunt for five peaks that rose like a hand in a haunted country and ran pure gold between them. Same thing you are after? I thought so. Late last fall my comrade sickened. I

sent him back with some Indians. A little later my Indians found out what I was after. They ran away from me. I decided I'd stick, built a cabin, stocked myself with food and lay down to winter it. Did it not badly—it was a pretty mild winter you'll remember. In the spring I started off again. A little less than two weeks ago I sighted the five peaks. Not from this side though—the other. Give me some more brandy."

"I'd made too wide a detour," he went on. "I'd gotten too far north, I beat back. From this side you see nothing but forest straight up to the base of the hand. Over on the other side—"

He was silent for a moment.

"Over there is forest too. But it doesn't reach so far. No! I came out of it. Stretching for miles in front of me was a level plain. It was as worn and ancient looking as the desert around the broken shell of Babylon. At this end rose the peaks. Between me and them—far off—was what looked like a low dike of rocks. Then—I ran across the road!"

"The road!" cried Anderson incredulously.

"The road," said the crawling man. "A fine, smooth, stone road. It ran straight on to the mountain. Oh, it was a road all right—and worn as though millions and millions of feet had passed over it for thousands of years. On each side of it were sand and heaps of stones. After a while I began to notice these stones. They were cut, and the shape of the heaps somehow gave me the idea that a hundred thousand years ago they might have been the ruins of houses. They were as old looking as that. I sensed man about them and at the same time they smelled of immemorial antiquity.

"The peaks grew closer. The heaps of ruins thicker. Something inexpressibly desolate hovered over them, something sinister; something reached from them that struck my heart like the touch of ghosts so old that they could be only the ghosts of ghosts. I went on.

"And now I saw that what I had thought to be the low range at the base of the peaks was a thicker litter of ruins. The Hand Mountain was really much farther off. The road itself passed through these ruins and between two high rocks that raised themselves like a gateway."

THE crawling man paused. His hands began that sickening pad—pad again. Little drops of bloody sweat showed on his forehead. But after a moment or two he grew quiet. He smiled.

"They were a gateway," he said. "I reached them. I went between them. I sprawled flat, clutching the earth in awe and terror. For I was on a broad stone platform. Before me was—sheer space! Imagine the Grand Canyon three times as wide, roughly circular and with the bottom dropped out. That would be something like what I was looking into.

It was like peeping over the edge of a cleft world down into the infinity where the planets roll! On the far side stood the five peaks. They looked like a gigantic warning hand stretching up to the sky. The lips of the abyss curved away on each side of me.

"I could see down perhaps a thousand feet. Then a thick blue haze shut out the eye. It was like the blue you see gather on the high hills at dusk. But the pit—it was awesome! Awesome as the Maori's Gulf of Ranelak, that sinks between the living and the dead and that only the freshly released soul has strength to leap across—but never strength to leap back again.

"I crept back from the verge and stood up, weak, shaking. My hand rested against one of the rocks of the gateway. There was carving upon it. There in sharp outlines was the heroic figure of a man. His back was turned. His arms were stretched above his head and between them he

carried something that looked like a sun disk with radiating lines of light. There were symbols on the disk that reminded me of Chinese. But they were not Chinese. No! They had been made by hands, dust ages before the Chinese stirred in the womb of time.

"I looked at the opposite rock. It bore an exactly similar figure. There was an odd peaked head-dress on both. The rocks themselves were triangular and the carvings were on the side closest the pit. The gesture of the men seemed to be that of holding something back—of barring. I looked closer. Behind the outstretched hands and the disks I seemed to see a host of vague shapes and, plainly a multitude of globes.

"I traced them out vaguely. Suddenly I felt unaccountably sick. There had come to me an impression—I can't call it sight—an impression of enormous upright slugs. Their swollen bodies seemed to dissolve, then swim into sight, then dissolve again—all except the globes which were their heads and that remained clear. They were—unutterably loathsome. Overcome by an inexplicable and overpowering nausea I stretched myself upon the slab. And then—I saw the stairway that led down into the pit!"

"A stairway!" we cried.

"A stairway," repeated the crawling man as patiently as before. "It seemed not so much carved out of the rock as built into it. Each slab was perhaps twenty feet long and five feet wide. They ran down from the platform and vanished into the blue haze."

"A stairway," said Anderson incredulously, built into the wall of a precipice and leading down into a bottomless pit—"

"Not bottomless," interrupted the crawling man. "There was a bottom. Yes. I reached it," he went on dully. "Down the stairway—down the stairway."

He seemed to grip his mind.

"Yes," he went on firmly. "I went down the stairway. But not that way. I made my camp back of the gates. At dawn I filled my knapsack with food, my two canteens with water from a spring that wells up there by the gateway, walked between the carved monoliths and stepped over the edge of the pit.

"The steps run along the side of the pit at a forty degree pitch. As I went down and down I studied them. They were of a greenish rock quite different from the granitic porphyry that formed the wall of the pit. At first I thought that the builders had taken advantage of an outcropping stratum, and had carved the gigantic flight from it. But the regularity of the angle at which it fell made me doubtful of this theory.

"After I had gone down perhaps half a mile I stepped out upon a landing. From this landing the stairs made a V-shaped turn and again ran on downward, clinging to the cliff at the same angle as the first flight. After I had made three of these turns I knew that the steps dropped straight down to wherever they went in a succession of angles. No strata could be so regular as that. No, the stairway was built by hands! By whose? And why? The answer is in those ruins around the edge of the pit—never I think to be read.

"By noon I had lost sight of the lip of the abyss. Above me, below me, was nothing but the blue haze. Beside me, too, was nothingness, for the further breast of rock had long since vanished in the same haze. I felt no dizziness, and no fear; only a vast curiosity. What was I to discover? Some ancient and wonderful civilization that had ruled when the poles were tropical garden? A new world? The key to the mystery of man himself? Nothing living, I felt sure—all was too old for life. Still, a work so wonderful must lead to something quite as wonderful I knew. What was it? I went on.

"At regular intervals I had passed the mouths of small

caves. There would be three thousand steps and then an opening, three thousand steps more and an opening—and so on and on. Late that afternoon I stopped before one of these clefts. I suppose I had gone then three miles down the pit, although the angles were such that I had walked in all fully ten miles. I examined the entrance. On each side was carved the same figures as on the great portals at the lip of the pit. But now they were standing face forward, the arms outstretched with their disks, as though holding something back from the shaft itself. Now, too, their faces were covered with veils and there were no hideous shapes behind them.

"I went inside the cave. It ran back for twenty yards like a burrow. It was dry and perfectly light. I could see, outside, the blue haze rising upward like a column. I felt an extraordinary sense of security, although I had not been conscious of any fear. I felt that the figures at the entrance were guardians—but against what? I felt so secure that even curiosity on this point was dulled.

"The blue haze thickened and grew faintly luminescent. I fancied that it was dusk above. I ate and drank a little and slept. When I awoke the blue had lightened again, and I fancied it was dawn above. I went on. I forgot the gulf yawning at my side. I felt no fatigue and little hunger or thirst, although I had drunk and eaten sparingly. That night I spent within another of the caves. And at dawn I descended again.

"It was late that day when I first saw the city—"

He was silent for a time.

"The city," he said at last, "the city of the pit! But not such a city as you have ever seen—nor any other man who has lived to tell of it. The pit, I think, must be shaped like a bottle; the opening before the five peaks is the neck. But how wide the bottom is I do not know—thousands of miles, maybe. And what may lie behind the city—I do not know.

"I had begun to catch little glints of light far down in the blue. Then I saw the tops of—trees, I suppose they are. But not our kind of trees—unpleasant, reptilian trees. They reared themselves on high, thin trunks and their tops were nests of thick tendrils with ugly little leaves like narrow heads—or snake heads.

"The trees were red, a vivid, angry red. Here and there I began to glimpse spots of shining yellow. I knew these were water because I could see things through their surface—or at least I could see the splash and ripple but what it was that disturbed them I never saw.

"Straight beneath me was the city. Mile after mile of closely packed cylinders that lay upon their sides in pyramids of three, or five—of dozens—piled upon each other. It is so hard to make you see what that city is like—look, suppose you have water pipes of a certain length and first you lay three of them side by side and on top of them you place two and on these two one; or suppose you take five for a foundation and place on these four and then three, then two and then one. Do you see? That was the way they looked.

"And they were topped by towers, by minarets, by flares, by fans and twisted monstrosities. They gleamed as though coated with pale rose flame. Beside them the venomous red trees raised themselves like the heads of hydras guarding nests of gigantic jeweled and sleeping worms!

"A few feet beneath me the stairway jutted out into a titanic arch, unearthly as the span that bridges Hell and leads to Asgard. It curved out and down straight through the top of the highest pile of cavern cylinders and then—it vanished through it. It was appalling—it was demonic—"

The crawling man stopped. His eyes rolled up into his head. He trembled and again his arms and legs began their horrible crawling movement. From his lips came

a whispering. It was an echo of the high murmuring we had heard the night he came to us. I put my hands over his eyes. He quieted.

"The things accursed!" he said. "The People of the Pit! Did I whisper? Yes—but they can't get me now—they can't!"

After a time he began as quietly as before.

"I crossed that span. I went down through the top of that—building. Blue darkness shrouded me for moment and I felt the steps twist into a spiral. I wound down and then I was standing high up in—I can't tell you what. I'll have to call it a room. We have no images for what is in the pit. A hundred feet below me was the floor. The walls sloped down and out from where I stood in a series of widening crescents. The place was colossal—and it was filled with a curious mottled red light. It was like the light inside a green and gold-flecked fire opal. The spiral stairs wound below me. I went down to the last step. Far in front of me rose a high columned altar. Its pillars were carved in monstrous scrolls—like mad octopuses with a thousand drunken tentacles; they rested on the backs of shapeless monstrosities carved in crimson stone. The altar front was a gigantic slab of purple covered with carvings.

"I can't describe these carvings! No human being could—the human eye cannot grasp them any more than it can grasp shapes that haunt the fourth dimension. Only a subtle sense in the back of the brain grasped them vaguely. They were formless things that gave no conscious image, yet pressed into the mind like small hot seals—ideas of hate—of combat between unthinkable monstrous things—victories in a nebulous hell of steaming, obscene jungles—aspirations and ideals immeasurably loathsome—

"And as I stood I grew aware of something that lay behind the lip of the altar fifty feet above me. I *knew* it was there—I felt it with every hair and every tiny bit of my skin. Something infinitely malignant, infinitely horrible, infinitely ancient. It lurked, it brooded, it saw me, it threatened and it—was invisible!

"Behind me was a circle of blue light. Something urged me to turn back, to climb the stairs and make way. It was impossible. Terror of that unseen watching thing behind the altar raced me onward like a whirlwind. I passed through the circle. I was in a way that stretched on into dim distance between the rows and carven cylinders.

"Here and there the red trees arose. Between them rolled the stone burrows. And now I could take in the amazing ornamentation that clothed them. They were like the trunks of smooth skinned trees that had fallen and had been clothed with high reaching fantastic orchids. Yes—those cylinders were like that—and more. They should have gone out with the dinosaurs. They were—monstrous! They struck the eyes like a blow and they passed across the nerves like a rasp. And nowhere was there sight or sound of a living thing.

"There were openings in the cylinders like the opening in the temple of the stairway through which I had run. I passed through one of them. I was in a long bare vaulted room whose curving sides half closed twenty feet over my head leaving a wide slit that opened into another vaulted chamber above. I saw nothing in the room save the same mottled reddish light on the temple.

"I stumbled. Still I could see nothing, but—my skin prickled and my heart stopped! There *was* something on the floor over which I had tripped!

"I reached down—and my hand touched a—thing—cold and smooth—that moved under it—I turned and ran out of that place. I was filled with a sick loathing that had in it something of madness—I ran on and on—blindly—wringing my hands—weeping with horror—

When I came to myself I was still among the stone cyl-

inders and red trees. I tried to retrace my steps, to find the temple; for now I was more than afraid. I was like a new soul panic-stricken with the first terrors of hell. But I could not find the temple! And the haze began to thicken and glow; the cylinders to shine more brightly.

"Suddenly I knew that it was dusk in my own world above and that the thickening of the haze was the signal for the awakening of whatever things lived in the pit.

"I scrambled up the sides of one of the burrows. I hid behind a twisted nightmare of stone. Perhaps, I thought, there was a chance of remaining hidden until the blue lightened, peril passed, and I could escape. There began to grow around me a murmur. It was everywhere—and it grew and grew into a great whispering. I peeped from the side of the stone down into the street.

"I saw lights passing and repassing. More and more lights—they swam out of the circular doorways and they thronged the street. The highest were eight feet above the pave; the lowest perhaps two. They hurried, they sauntered, they bowed, they stopped and whispered—and there was *nothing* under them!"

"Nothing under them!" breathed Anderson.

"No," he went on, "that was the terrible part of it—there was nothing under them. Yet certainly the lights were living things. They had consciousness, volition—what else I did not know. They were nearly two feet across, the largest. Their center was a bright nucleus—red, blue, green. This nucleus faded off gradually into a misty glow that did not end abruptly. It, too, seemed to fade off into nothingness—but a nothingness that had under it a—somethingness.

"I strained my eyes trying to grasp this body into which the lights merged and which one could only *feel* was there, but could not see.

"And all at once I grew rigid. Something cold, and thin like a whip, had touched my face. I turned my head. Close behind were three of the lights. They were a pale blue. They looked at me—if you can imagine lights that are eyes.

"Another whiplash gripped my shoulder. Under the closest light came a shrill whispering. I shrieked. Abruptly the murmuring in the street ceased.

"I dragged my eyes from the pale-blue globe that held them and looked out; the lights in the streets were rising by myriads to the level of me. They crowded and jostled as though they were a crowd of curious people on Broadway.

"That was the horrible part of it. I felt a score of the lashes touch me—I shrieked again. Then—darkness and a sensation of falling through vast depths.

"When I awoke to consciousness I was again in the great place of the stairway, lying at the foot of the altar. All was silent. There were no lights—only the mottled red glow.

"I jumped to my feet and ran toward the steps. Something jerked me back to my knees. And then I saw that around my waist had been fastened a yellow ring of metal. From it hung a chain, and this chain passed up over the lip of the high ledge.

"I reached into my pockets for my knife to cut through the ring. It was not there! I had been stripped of everything except one of the canteens that I had hung around my neck, and which I suppose they had thought was part of me.

"I tried to break the ring. It seemed alive. It writhed in my hands and drew itself closer around me!

"I pulled at the chain. It was immovable. There came over me in a flood consciousness of the unseen thing above the altar, and I groveled at the foot of the slab. Think—alone in that place of strange light with the brooding ancient horror above me—a monstrous thing, a thing un-

thinkable,—an unseen thing that poured forth horror—

"After a while I gripped myself. Then I saw beside one of the pillars a yellow bowl filled with a thick, white liquid. I drank it. If it killed I did not care. But its taste was pleasant, and as I drank strength came back to me with a rush. Clearly I was not to be starved. The people of the pit, whatever they were, had a conception of human needs.

"And now once more the reddish mottled gleam began to deepen. Again outside arose the humming, and through the circle that was the entrance to the temple came streaming the globes. They ranged themselves in ranks until they filled the temple. Their whispering grew into a chant, a cadenced whispering chant that rose and fell, rose and fell, while to its rhythm the globes lifted and sank, lifted and sank.

"All that night the lights came and went; and all that night the chant sounded as they rose and fell. At the last I felt myself only an atom of consciousness in the sea of that whispering; an atom that rose and fell with the bowing globes.

"I tell you that even my heart pulsed in unison with them! And the red glow faded, the lights streamed out; the whispering died. I was again alone, and I knew that again day had begun in my own world.

"I slept. When I awoke I found beside the pillar another bowl of the white liquid. I scrutinized the chain that held me to the altar. I began to rub two of the links together. I did this for hours. When the red began to thicken there was a ridge worn in the links. Hope rushed up within me. There was, then, a chance to escape.

"With the thickening the lights came again. All through that night the whispering chant sounded, and the globes rose and fell. The chant seized me. It pulsed through me until every nerve and muscle quivered to it. My lips began to quiver. They strove like a man trying to cry out in a nightmare. And at last they, too, were whispering—whispering the evil chant of the people of the pit. My body bowed in unison with the lights.

"I was—God forgive me!—in movement and sound, one with these nameless things, while my soul sank back sick with horror, but powerless. And as I whispered I—saw them!

"Saw the things under the lights. Great transparent snail-like bodies—dozens of waving tentacles stretching from them; little round gaping mouths under the luminous, seeing globes. They were like specters of inconceivably monstrous slugs! And as I stared, still bowing and whispering, the dawn came, and they streamed to and through the entrance. They did not crawl or walk—they floated! They floated and were—gone!

"I did not sleep. I worked all that day at my chain. By the thickening of the red I had worn it a sixth through. And all that night, under their spell, I whispered and bowed with the pit people, joining in their chant to the thing that brooded above me!

"Twice again the red thickened and lessened and the chant held me. And then, on the morning of the fifth day, I broke the worn links. I was free! I ran to the stairway. With eyes closed I rushed up and past the unseen horror behind the altar-ledge and was out upon the bridge. I crossed the span and began the ascent of the stairway.

"Can you think what it is to climb straight up the verge of a cleft-world—with hell behind you? Well—worse than hell was behind me, and terror rode.

"The city of the pit had long been lost in the blue haze before I knew that I could climb no more. My heart beat upon my ears like a sledge. I fell before one of the little caves, feeling that here at last was sanctuary. I crept far back within it and waited for the haze to thicken. Almost at once it did so, and from far below me came a vast and angry murmur. Crouching at the back of the cave, I saw a swift light go shooting up through the blue haze, then

die down and break, and as it dimmed and broke I saw myriads of the globes that are the eyes of the pit people swing downward into the abyss. Again and again the light pulsed, and the globes rose with it and fell.

"They were hunting me! They knew I must be somewhere still on the stairway, or, if hiding below, I must some time take to the stairway to escape. The whispering grew louder, more insistent.

"There began to pulse through me a dreadful desire to join in the whispering as I had done in the temple. Something told me that if I did, the sculptured figures could no longer save me; that I would go out and down again into the temple forever! I bit my lips through and through to still them, and all that night the beam shot up through the abyss, the globes swung, and the whispering sounded—and I prayed to the power of the caves and the sculptured figures that still had power to guard them."

He paused—his strength was going.

THEN almost in a whisper: "I thought, what were the people who carved them? Why had they built their city around the verge, and why had they set that stairway in the pit? What had they been to the things that dwelt at the bottom, and what use had the things been to them that they should live beside their dwelling-place? That there had been some purpose was certain. No work so prodigious as the stairway would have been undertaken otherwise. But what was the purpose? And why was it that those who had dwelt about the abyss had passed away ages gone and the dwellers in the abyss still lived?"

He looked at us: "I could find no answer. I wonder if even when I am dead I shall know? I doubt it.

"Dawn came as I wondered, and with it—silence. I drank what was left of the liquid in my canteen, crept from the cave, and began to climb again. That afternoon my legs gave out. I tore off my shirt and made from it pads for my knees and coverings for my hands. I crawled upward. I crawled up and up. And again I crept into one of the caves and waited until again the blue thickened, the shaft of light shot through it, and the whispering came.

"But now there was a new note in the whispering. It was no longer threatening. It called and coaxed. It drew.

"A terror gripped me. There had come upon me a mighty desire to leave the cave and go out where the lights swung; to let them do with me what they pleased, carry me where they wished. The desire grew. It gained fresh impulse with every rise of the beam, until at last I vibrated with the desire as I had vibrated to the chant in the Temple.

"My body was a pendulum. Up would go the beam, and I would swing toward it! Only my soul kept steady. It held me fast to the floor of the cave, and it placed a hand over my lips to still them. And all that night I fought with my body and lips against the spell of the pit people.

"Dawn came. Again I crept from the cave and faced the stairway. I could not rise. My hands were torn and bleeding, my knees an agony. I forced myself upward step by step.

After a while my hands became numb, the pain left my knees. They deadened. Step by step my will drove my body upward upon them. And time after time I would sink back within myself to oblivion—only to wake again and find that all the time I had been steadily climbing upward.

"And then—only a dream of crawling up infinite stretches of steps—memories of dull horror while hidden within caves, with thousands of lights pulsing without, and whispering that called and called me—memory of a time when I awoke to find that my body was obeying the call and had carried me half-way out between the guardians of the portals, while thousands of gleaming globes rested in the blue haze and watched me. Glimpses of bitter fights against sleep,

(Continued on page 125)

The MAN WHO COULD VANISH

By A. Hyatt Verrill

"Beyond the Pole," "Through the Crater's Rim," etc.



Instantly pandemonium broke loose. Screams, shouts, frightened cries rose from the crowd which had quickly gathered, and awed, unable to believe their eyes, men, women and children shoved, crowded, and fought to make way for the woman's form floating in air through their midst.

PROLOGUE



IN the third day of last August the public was astounded by a story which appeared in every newspaper in the country. Extra editions of even the most staid and conservative papers appeared on the streets shortly after noon and, in screaming headlines, announced:

"HARTWELL BUILDING DISAPPEARS. TWENTY STORY STRUCTURE VANISHES IN BROAD DAYLIGHT AND REAPPEARS. MARVELOUS AND INEXPLICABLE ILLUSION WITNESSED BY CROWDS. BELIEVED TO BE A DEMONSTRATION BY SOME MASTER HYPNOTIST SEEKING PUBLICITY."

It is not necessary to quote the stories that occupied entire pages of the press, for while all agreed in the main essentials, no two were the same and all contained glaring errors and discrepancies. Moreover, the events must still be fresh in the minds of my readers. Suffice to say that each and every account stated that the new Hartwell Building, in process of construction on Nineteenth Street, had suddenly vanished from sight during the noon hour; that hundreds of citizens had packed the thoroughfare; that the police and fire departments had been called out, and that, for a space of several minutes, only a vacant lot and an immense excavation had been visible where the building had stood. Then, while the crowd looked on, the structure had reappeared as suddenly and mysteriously as it had vanished.

The story was so utterly incredible, that at first, many persons thought it merely a canard or some advertising or publicity scheme. But as, during the following days, the press was filled with accounts of the phenomenon as related by eyewitnesses, and as the police and fire department officials confirmed the reports, and there could be no question regarding the authenticity of the story, innumerable theories and explanations were suggested, and so for days the crowds thronged the streets near the Hartwell Building and stood, gazing expectantly, in the hopes that it might repeat its mysterious behavior.

The consensus of opinion was that the astounding occurrence had been brought about by some hypnotist or fakir who, as the East Indian magicians are supposed to do, had hypnotised the on-lookers, and that the disappearance of the building had been wholly an illusion. "No doubt," said the "Times," "the public will soon be informed that Signor So-and-So, the world's greatest hypnotist and illusionist, will appear at a certain theatre, with a further announcement of the fact that the Signor deluded hundreds of persons, and by his mesmeric powers, caused them to believe that a twenty-story building could vanish into thin air."

But as time went on and no one came forward to claim the doubtful honor of being able to accomplish such a feat, by hypnotism or otherwise, the mystery deepened, and every conceivable theory—both natural and supernatural, was advanced to explain the wholly unaccountable phenomenon.

Up to the present time the truth has never been known, and only two men in the world are aware of the actual facts

and the real solution of the mystery. One of these is Doctor Lemuel Unsinn, Professor of Physics at Stanforth University, and my life-time friend and college chum; the other is myself. As the time has now passed when any harm can come from giving the true story to the world, and as the explanation is even more incredible and remarkable than any of the imaginary solutions put forth, we have agreed that the public should be made acquainted with the facts. Indeed, the authentic story would have been published some months ago had it not been essential to make certain arrangements to safeguard the secret, and whose making required much more time than had been anticipated.

In order to make clear just how the astounding occurrence took place, and to enable my readers to thoroughly understand my true if incredible story, it will be necessary to begin at the beginning and to recount every detail of the events which led to the final results. To many readers much of this matter will no doubt, prove rather dry, and, if I were writing fiction, I would omit all those portions of the tale which deal with the scientific side and the preliminaries. But both Dr. Unsinn and myself feel that to omit such matters would be a great mistake, and that as the story is of as much interest and importance to the scientific world as to the layman, nothing should be left untold. Moreover, we feel that unless such matters were included my story would be considered as purely fictitious. And at any rate the reader is at liberty to skip such portions of my narrative as the appreciative reader may find to be lacking in real and genuine interest.

CHAPTER I

Doctor Unsinn Propounds Some Theories

IT really began when I was visiting my old friend and chum, Dr. Lemuel Unsinn, soon after his return from an international conference of scientists.

He had been telling me of the various new discoveries

which had been announced by his fellows, and mentioned certain phenomena of light rays, which, hitherto unseen, had now been brought within the scope of human vision. Although I could not, as a layman, see the importance of the discovery, my friend was most enthusiastic about the matter, and, among other statements, declared that it might yet be possible to render objects invisible.

I laughed. "That is utterly impossible," I declared.

"Nothing within the realms of Science is impossible," he retorted.

"Perhaps not," I admitted, "but there are many things which are so highly im-

probable that to all intents and purposes they are beyond possibility or reason."

"Utter nonsense!" he ejaculated. Ignorance, lack of imagination, pig-headed conservatism. Every advance made by Science has been declared improbable or impossible, or both, until its feasibility has been proven. Railways, steamships, the telegraph and telephone, radio, airplanes—all have been laughed at and declared impossibilities until they became actualities. "Science," he went on, assuming his lecture-room manner, and looking at me over the rims of his glasses, "science does not acknowledge the existence of

If you have read "Beyond the Pole" by A. Hyatt Verrill, you will no doubt be interested in the present story by the same author. We have no hesitancy in recommending it, and at the same time stating that we believe it is one of the greatest stories on man-made invisibility which has ever appeared. In these latter days of science it would be rash to say that invisibility can not be produced. Already Dr. Jules Steam, of Alsace-Lorraine, has produced partial invisibility by injecting certain liquids into animal tissue, which makes the animal practically transparent when it is viewed in a certain light. The full details of his experiments were published in the February, 1921, issue of SCIENCE AND INVENTION. No experiments have been made on human beings as yet. There is no question but that sooner or later the problem of invisibility will be solved. Just what might happen when the secret is found is well related by the author of this story, which you will read not only with great interest but with much amusement as well.

the words impossible and improbable. What seems a mere dream today may become an every-day affair tomorrow. The scientist——"

"Oh, all right," I laughed. "Cut out the lecture. Granting that nothing is beyond Science, as represented by my old friend, Lemuel Unsinn, how do you propose going about it?"

"I presume you refer to the matter of rendering visible objects invisible," he smiled, leaning back in his chair and placing the tips of his fingers together.

I nodded.

"Hmm, I hardly care to divulge all my ideas, even to such an old friend as yourself," he chuckled. "But I am willing to suggest lines along which such investigations might be conducted. You state that it is preposterous to consider making visible, solid matter invisible. Is it any more preposterous than to make inaudible sounds audible, invisible things visible, or audible sounds inaudible?"

I shook my head. "No, I'd say one's as impossible as the other."

Lemuel grinned. "Which shows your monumental ignorance," he exclaimed. "My dear boy," he continued, "those feats are all accomplished facts and are so familiar to you that you do not realize they exist. The inaudible waves transmitted by radio are rendered audible in the receiving set; the audible waves which enter the microphone of the transmitting station are sent inaudibly through the ether; and heat, which is invisible under certain conditions is plainly visible under other conditions which occur every day."

"Yes," I granted rather grudgingly, "I'll admit the matter of sounds, but I'd like to know when and how heat can be seen. That is, unless you refer to the wavy effect seen above a pavement or sand on a hot day."

"No, there you have air," usually invisible, rendered visible by its motion," replied my friend. "But you have undoubtedly seen red-hot and white-hot metal. And there you have heat made visible. Heat, sound, light and probably scent also, are all caused by vibratory waves. Waves varying in length from the shortest X-rays and Gamma rays to the longest recorded waves; waves varying from less than a billionth part of a meter to over one-hundred-and-fifty thousand meters in length. Unfortunately, however, the human system is not designed or attuned to register or recognize more than an infinitely small proportion of these vibratory waves. Our eyes can only record those which range between violet and red, but our nerves and ears can detect others which are invisible. For example, there are the heat waves which are too long for us to see. But if, by heating an object, we decrease the length of the waves until they come within the limits of our vision we see the heat waves as red. And by still heating the object the hotter waves appear to us as violet, white or yellow; white being, as you know, merely a mixture or combination of the various light waves. In other words, my dear boy, our eyes, our nerves, our ears, and in all probability our noses as well, are much like radio receiving sets. We can 'tune in' waves of light, sound, heat and scent within certain limits, and, like radio receiving sets, we often fail to 'tune out' interferences. Many sounds are far too high or too low for the human ear to detect, just as many light waves are too short or too long for us to see."

"All extremely interesting and educational," I said. "But what bearing does all this have on the matter under discussion—the rendering of various objects—any object I believe you said,—invisible?"

"Let me reply by asking you a question," smiled my friend. "Why are objects—human beings, houses, trees, anything we see,—visible? Merely because they reflect light," he continued without waiting for my answer. "Very well, then. We see an object because it reflects light;

we see colors on that object because it has properties which cause it to absorb certain light rays and to reflect others—if red to us, it absorbs the violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow and orange rays. If it appears white it reflects all the rays. If black, it absorbs them. In other words we do not actually see the object at all. We merely see the light waves reflected from the object. And if means can be found to cause the object to absorb the light rays——"

"You'd have a black object instead of a colored one," I laughed.

"Exactly," agreed my friend quite unperturbed. "Provided the absorption was imperfect," he added. "But," he continued, "if the means were such as to cause perfect absorption, in other words to allow the light waves to pass through the object, then it would become invisible, just as clear glass is invisible, even though glass reflects certain waves of light which cannot be detected by the human eye."

I chuckled. The idea of transforming opaque objects to transparent objects seemed highly amusing. "Go to it," I laughed, "Why not begin with the ladies? Their clothes are pretty transparent now."

"If you are trying to be facetious there's no use in my attempting to explain my ideas and theories," commented Dr. Unsinn in an injured tone.

"I wasn't laughing at your theories," I assured him. "And I'm really interested, even if I don't see what you're getting at."

"If your sense of logic and your knowledge of science were as highly developed as your sense of humor and your knowledge of women's garments, you might more readily grasp what I am 'getting at' as you put it," he said dryly. "However," he continued, "I had no intention of conveying the idea that I believed visible objects could be rendered invisible by such means. But if, by altering the frequency or lengths of light waves reflected from an object, we could render such waves too short or too long for the human eye to register, then the object would become wholly invisible."

By this time I was really interested. My friend's arguments were, I knew, sound. If the frequency of one form of vibratory wave could be altered; if an oscillating wave could be changed to a direct wave or vice versa, if the inaudible radio waves could be made audible by the simplest of instruments, was there any scientific reason why light waves ordinarily visible might not be made invisible?

"And the man who succeeds in accomplishing such a feat will control the world," declared Dr. Unsinn interrupting my thoughts. "Imagine it! Think for a moment what it would mean! He could command anything, everything. He could amass millions, billions if he wished. He could control the destinies of nations! No treaties, no plots, no business deals could be secret. He could go anywhere, unknown, unsuspected, unseen. Why," he exclaimed, as he sprang from his chair and began excitedly pacing the room. "Think what it would mean to a nation! 'Armies, battleships, invisible! And——'"

"Think what it would mean to the crooks," I broke in. "Better not delve too far, Old Man. You might succeed and your secret might leak out. Well, I must be going. Good luck to you in your experiments. And"—with a laugh, "Let's hope that the next time I see you I shan't see you at all."

CHAPTER II

An Amazing Demonstration

A FEW days after the foregoing conversation with my old friend, Doctor Unsinn, important business unexpectedly called me to South America.

Although his words often occurred to me on the long journey south, yet I gave them little serious consideration,

for I knew that Lemuel, like so many scientific men, was prone to theorize and to argue most plausibly and convincingly in support of some theory, even if he had no real faith in it. And, amid new scenes and new friends, and with matters of much more pressing importance to occupy my attention, all thoughts of Dr. Unsinn's weird ideas were completely driven from my mind.

Not until several months later when I was homeward bound, did I again think of our last conversation. I had, to be sure, dropped him a postcard now and then, but I had received no reply and did not expect any. Lemuel was never one to write, and he considered it a waste of time to carry on a purposeless correspondence with anyone, although he would fill page after page with facts, figures and theories in letters to other scientists. Now, however, as I recalled our conversation, I found myself wondering if he had actually attempted to carry his theory to a test. Of course the idea was ridiculously bizarre and unattainable and yet, I felt sure that Dr. Unsinn had actually been in earnest and really believed that it was scientifically possible to produce invisibility in solid matter.

And the more I mentally reviewed his words and analyzed his statements, the more I felt that he might be right, at least theoretically. After all, was such a feat any more remarkable than the fact that the ship's wireless operator was talking and listening to people thousands of miles distant and separated from our ship by countless leagues of sea and land? And yet the idea of any material object being invisible seemed so far-fetched and supernatural that I could not bring myself to believe that Lemuel would ever attempt to experiment along such lines. Nevertheless, I had thought so much on the subject that, at the first opportunity after my arrival, and reaching my apartment, I called Dr. Unsinn, by phone and, after the usual greetings, asked how he was succeeding in his black art. Perhaps he felt slightly piqued at my tone or my words, but instantly there was a change in his voice and he replied, rather shortly, that it was evident that I had not improved in my attitude towards science, but that, as an old chum and friend, he would be glad to have me call whenever I found it convenient.

Just why my curiosity had been aroused I cannot say, but curious I was nevertheless and within the hour I was at Lemuel's door. His Filipino servant Miguel, answered the bell and greeted me with a welcoming grin on his usually emotionless face.

"The Señor Doctor is in the laboratory," he announced as I entered. "He say you will please to await him in the library. He will arrive in one little moment."

I was somewhat surprised for, as a rule, I was welcome to enter Lemuel's holy of holies whenever I called, and never before had I been asked to await his pleasure like a perfect stranger. But no doubt, I thought, he was busy on some delicate experiment and did not wish to be interrupted. Entering the library I turned to a table littered with magazines and scientific reports and rather idly glanced through them. A sound, like the creaking of a foot-step on a loose board caused me to turn, but the door was open, the hallway was in plain view and no one was in sight. Once more I resumed my perusal of the periodicals and was becoming a bit interested in an article I ran across, when I was startled by a low chuckle. Instantly I wheeled about, surprised that I had not heard my friend's approach, only to find the room empty. Then, as I stood, rather foolishly gaping I fear, and puzzled to understand how my ears had deceived me, I fairly jumped. Out of the obviously empty room came Dr. Unsinn's unmistakable voice.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," it said; "you're looking exceedingly well after your trip."

For an instant a strange creepy sensation swept over me. Then I realized that this must be one of my friend's

practical jokes. No doubt he had installed some sort of telephone or loud speaker arrangement in the apartment and was testing it out on me.

As nearly as I could judge, the words had come from the farther corner of the room where there was a large, deeply-upholstered chair. Taking a step nearer, I peered into the corner, trying to discover the hidden instrument. And as I gazed at the chair I rubbed my eyes and wondered if I were taking leave of my senses.

Slightly above the back of the chair and suspended in mid-air were a pair of spectacles. On the left side and a short distance below was a round metal disc and also seemingly floating in the atmosphere, were a number of buttons, a gold watch and a chain, two small ornamental silver buckles, some cuff links and a large signet ring. Just below these and suspended a few inches above the chair seat were several silver coins, while just above the floor four rows of small metal rings hung without any support whatsoever.

Even while I gazed, dumbfounded, utterly at a loss to account for this strange hallucination, that ghostly chuckle again issued from the corner, and I saw the various objects sway, the coins shift their position and the ring move towards the spectacles which seemed to follow it. As though drawn by a magnet, as it again descended to its former position. Then, once again, the uncanny voice spoke.

"My dear boy, your expression is most remarkable," it said. "You really should see yourself. But it is most gratifying to me for it proves my test is a success. If I remember correctly, you remarked, when I last saw you, that you hoped the next time you saw me you would not see me at all. Well, your wish is granted, you are gazing—or rather I might say, gaping, at me without seeing me. But I do not wonder you are amazed and also incredulous—don't deny it, I can see you think this some hoax. However—"

I had been gazing, gaping; jaw dropped, mouth open, eyes fairly popping, as the voice spoke, and fascinated, I saw the watch, the discs and the money slowly rise upward and come towards me. The next instant I fairly shrieked and leaped back. An unseen ghostly hand had gripped my shoulder! A hearty peal of laughter rang through the apartment as, shaken, almost terror stricken, I shrank back against the old-fashioned mantel.

"Yes, my experiment is a complete success," announced the disembodied voice, "but there is no need to carry the test further. You see my 'black art' as you call it has worked, and the impossible has been made possible. But I feel you will be more at ease if I am visible. No doubt it will take time to accustom yourself to the phenomenon."

Hardly had the last word been issued when the watch, the discs and the coins vanished, and Dr. Unsinn stood before me, as solid, as substantial and as natural as ever.

I collapsed. It was almost as great a shock to my nerves to see my friend materialize from the air as it had been to hear his voice, to feel his grip when he had been invisible, yes, invisible, for no longer could I doubt that the scientist had succeeded in making the impossible possible.

"I think I have answered your query of this morning," exclaimed Dr. Unsinn triumphantly, as he seated himself in his favorite chair. "I felt quite sure of my success even before you arrived," he continued. "I could not be sure, however, for, strangely enough,—and quite surprising and as yet somewhat inexplicable to me, I can see myself in a mirror even when invisible to others. But I tried it to a slight extent on Miguel, although I dared not put the fellow to a thorough test,—too superstitious and excitable you know. Might have died of fright or have bolted, if I had spoken, or if he had noticed anything such as my watch or buttons. Ah, you noticed such objects did you not?"

By this time I had regained a bit of my composure and enough breath to speak. "I'll say I did," I replied. "But why allow such objects to remain visible?"

"Hmm, that is my great difficulty," replied Lemuel regretfully. "It is obvious that the same treatment will not serve for all objects. I have learned how to render any organic substance invisible, but, as yet, I have not discovered how to accomplish the result with inorganic matter. My body, my clothing, my shoes, yes, even objects of wood are, by my method, easily rendered invisible, but metals—my watch, my suspender buttons, the coins in my pocket and the eyelets for my shoe strings resist, so far, all my efforts."

"But how," I interrupted, "do you do it?"

Dr. Unsinn smiled knowingly. "That is a secret I do not care to divulge," he replied. "But," he went on, "in a general way it is along the lines I suggested during our last conversation on the subject,—by altering the frequency of light waves so that they become invisible to the human eye. As you, my friend, are deplorably ignorant of higher physics, I may perhaps better explain the process by comparing it with certain phenomena of radio with which you may be more or less familiar. Do you know the meaning of the term 'heterodyne?'"

I nodded.

"Good," continued Lemuel. "Then I can state that by my process I send out certain vibratory waves from my apparatus, and these, striking the light rays, reflect them back with a frequency which renders them invisible. In other words, the light rays which would, normally, strike a solid object, and, being reflected therefrom, would cause that object to become visible, are prevented from striking that object by my method, but strike an armor of an envelope of outgoing vibratory waves. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly," I lied blithely, not in the least understanding the scientific side of the explanation, but deeply interested nevertheless. "But," I asked, "I don't understand why some objects remain visible while others vanish, and I didn't notice any apparatus for bringing on your astounding invisibility."

"I do not myself fully understand why organic objects should respond to my treatment and inorganic objects should resist it," admitted my friend. "But it is probably due to the fact that inorganic materials do not throw off my vibratory waves at the same frequency as organic materials. But I will solve the problem; I must solve it! As for your other query, the appliance which I employ is very compact and becomes invisible together with myself. At first the apparatus was cumbersome and clumsy, but I have now perfected it and have it so readily and perfectly under control that it is even more simple than tuning-in on a small radio receiving set. Indeed, the results may be brought about slowly and gradually, as I will demonstrate."

As Dr. Unsinn stood before me an incredibly weird change came over him. A thin haze seemed to envelop his body, and as I stared fascinated, the haze seemed slowly to clear away and to my indescribable amazement I saw the curtained doorway leading into the room whose portière and parts of whose frame appeared through my friend's body and head. If ever there was a ghost Lemuel was one. And then, as if snuffed out, Lemuel completely vanished and only his spectacles, the fraternity button on his lapel, his watch and chain, his cuff-links, his belt and arm-garter buckles, his ring, watch and chain and the other metallic objects of his apparel remained to assure my reeling senses that Dr. Unsinn still stood before me.

I cannot begin to describe the sensation of thus seeing my companion vanish before my eyes, but it was nothing compared to the creepy, uncanny nerve-racking sensation which followed, as Lemuel's characteristic chuckle issued from the transparent air and he again spoke.

"For Heaven's sake!" I cried, "Don't do that. I'll

have a nervous collapse if that disembodied voice of yours keeps on."

The voice laughed, but the next instant my friend was before me as substantial as ever.

"You'll get accustomed to the sensation," he declared, "but—"

"Never," I broke in. "No normal person could ever get accustomed to seeing a man vanish before his eyes or to hearing a voice talking from thin air."

"Hmm, I had rather expected something of this sort," admitted Lemuel. "No doubt it is a bit unnerving but you must accustom yourself to the phenomenon. Now, if you will follow my directions and, using a duplicate instrument, will render yourself invisible—"

"I will not!" I declared. "I have no desire to try the experiment. But even if I did I fail to see how that would render your disappearance any less uncanny."

"It is my belief," replied Dr. Unsinn, "that if you were treated by my waves I would still be visible to you and you to me. I am, as I informed you, quite visible to myself when I look in a mirror. This I assume is due to some effect which my apparatus exercises upon the optic nerves, thus enabling the eye to register the light-waves even when their frequency is accelerated. I am most anxious to test the matter and you will confer a great favor by acceding to my wishes."

"Not a bit of it," I declared. "You can monkey with such things all you wish, but I'm perfectly satisfied to remain visible."

Lemuel shook his head sadly. "You're a conservative imbecile," he informed me. "I had counted on your accompanying me, as I go about, in order to note the effect upon the public, and it would be most desirable that you should also be invisible."

"Look here," I said. "I know you can vanish; I know it's all a perfectly natural feat, but it's too devilishly creepy and uncanny for my nerves. And if you're going to keep on being snuffed out and talking from an invisible mouth I'll leave you to your own devices and not come near your place."

Dr. Unsinn grinned. "You forget that you couldn't prevent me from coming to see you," he reminded me. "I could enter your apartment unseen and unsuspected. I might be seated on one of your chairs or lying on a couch in the same room with you and you'd never suspect it."

"If I didn't see your confounded watch and other metallic articles," I assented. "But with all your darned scientific ardor I know you're not one to butt-in where you're not wanted,—even for the sake of an experiment."

"But all joking aside," said my friend, "I am sorry that your nerves should be upset by my demonstration. However, there is, I think, a means of overcoming all your objections and yet helping me with my most valuable and interesting experiments. I have, in fact, devised a little instrument which will enable you to see me even when I am invisible to others."

Rising, he opened a cabinet, and turning, handed me a small rectangular box slightly larger than a cigarette case. To one end of the box a fine braided cord was attached with the other end terminating in a pair of metal-rimmed, slightly tinted, eyeglasses.

"If you will place the detector case in your pocket and adjust the glasses on your nose, we will try an interesting test," announced Dr. Unsinn.

"Look here," I said. "Is this some darned trick to make me invisible?"

"I assure you it is not," he declared. "But if I am not vastly mistaken it will prevent me from becoming invisible to you."

Somewhat hesitatingly, and without the least faith in the apparently simple device, I slipped the case in my

breast pocket and placed the glasses on my nose. As far as I could see all objects remained the same as before, though everything, including Lemuel's face, took on a peculiar pinkish tint, due, I supposed, to the color of the glasses.

"I presume you have no difficulty in seeing the various objects about the room, including myself," said my friend.

"Not a bit," I assured him.

"Then, if you will kindly press the lever on the case we will proceed."

Examining the case, I noticed a small lever or arm which fitted snugly into a small groove on one edge of the affair.

"Lift the lever and move it forward—toward the cord, as far as it will go," said my friend.

A slight click followed by an almost inaudible whistling sound issued from the case as I obeyed his instructions. But, as far as I could see, there were no other results. Lemuel still sat in his chair, his legs crossed, his elbows on the chair-arms, the tips of his fingers together, and his mild blue eyes looking over the tops of his glasses.

"The confounded contraption's a dud," I exclaimed, "everything's just the same."

"Precisely," my friend agreed. "But just remove the glasses from your eyes for a moment."

As I complied with his request I uttered a cry of utter amazement. Dr. Unsinn was absolutely invisible!

"Now replace the glasses," said his disembodied voice.

Hardly knowing what to expect, absolutely dumbfounded, I again placed the glasses before my eyes and there sat my friend as before. I could not believe it. I could not believe that this "now you see him and now you don't" effect was produced by the glasses. No, I felt sure, it was a trick on Lemuel's part. He must manage to vanish and to reappear coincidentally with my donning or removing the lenses. But he assured me,—quite heatedly and convincingly,—that he had remained in the invisible state throughout the experiment, and, moreover, he was so evidently highly elated at the success of his invention that at last I was forced to believe that the magic glasses actually rendered the invisible visible. But my brain was now in a complete chaos. My friend's power to render himself invisible, the fact that certain objects remained visible, the effect of the glasses rendering him visible to me while still invisible to ordinary eyes, were all unquestionable facts; but they were so weird, uncanny and downright supernatural, that I felt as if in a confused, preposterous dream, and I half expected to wake up at any moment.

"It's splendid," exclaimed Lemuel, interrupting my chaotic thoughts. "Even if I cannot overcome your absurd and unreasonable objections to becoming invisible it now matters little."

"Look here!" I ejaculated. "Just what are you planning to do? Are you going out to amass the millions you spoke of, to control the world? I'll admit there's no reason why you should not succeed,—possessing your secret, nothing is impossible of attainment, but if you plan taking me along you're mistaken. I'm not invisible and I don't intend to be, and I can easily foresee where I'd be the goat for any counfounded ghostly acts you perpetrated."

Dr. Unsinn laughed heartily. "My dear boy!" he cried, controlling his merriment. "You appear to forget that I am a scientist and a respected member of the community with a reputation to uphold. I have not the least desire or intention to overstep the bounds of honesty, law, or proper behavior, even if invisible. If I were so minded I could, as you know, help myself to the world's treasures, could control the destinies of nations, could in fact place myself beyond the power of man or the law. But my sole idea is to use my discovery for the benefit of mankind, to

perfect it and give it to the world, as so many great discoveries have been given. We men of science are never materialists."

"You're an idiot!" I exclaimed. "Benefit of mankind! Give it to the world! Why, if you gave your discovery to the world,—if you gave the secret to anyone,—it would be a curse to mankind; you'd be destroying law and order and the world!"

"Hmm, perhaps there is something in that," admitted Lemuel regretfully. "But at any rate, I must discover how to treat inorganic substances before any very extensive experiments can be conducted. It would hardly do for a crowd to see a watch and buttons wandering about without visible attachment or reason."

"You might leave your watch behind, and use bone or fibre buttons," I suggested.

"But, my dear man," objected my friend, "unless I can render all substances invisible I shall feel that my efforts have been in vain."

"And I sincerely hope you fail," I informed him. "I don't see what good it will do for the rest of the world, and if it leaks out, Heaven help us."

"Just what thousands of conservative hide-bound persons have said of every great discovery of the past," exclaimed Lemuel, as I rose to take my leave.

CHAPTER III

Dr. Unsinn Perfects His Invention

AS I walked towards my apartment, my mind was, of course, filled with thoughts of my friend's amazing discovery. And, among other matters, it came to me, as a rather curious and amusing fact, that Dr. Unsinn, who had dwelt so enthusiastically upon the material possibilities of invisibility, when he first discussed the matter, was now far more interested in proving his scientific theories than in profiting by his discovery. It was typical of the man, and is, I believe, of most scientists. But a more disturbing thought was that my friend was deplorably absent-minded,—a common trait of scientists also, especially when preoccupied with some experiment, and, being so inherently honest and frank himself, he was too prone to assume that his fellow-beings were the same. In this day, so I feared, a very grave danger. I remembered occasions in the past when, suddenly side-tracked by some new lead, he had completely forgotten formulae or calculations which had enabled him to succeed in some experiment, and had never been able to duplicate the results. Might he not, in endeavoring to perfect some feature of his own discovery, forget some important detail and find himself unable to restore himself to visible form? It was in fact this chance that had caused me to refuse to test his device upon myself. I could see where it might be most entertaining and advantageous to become invisible temporarily, but I had no desire to remain in that condition indefinitely, and any failure of Lemuel's device, any miscalculation, any accident or any sudden illness on his part might leave me forever incapable of resuming my visible form. The risk to be sure might be small, but it was far too great for me to take. And finally, there was the chance that Dr. Unsinn might, in his ardor and enthusiasm, divulge his secret. Unquestionably he would wish to announce his discovery to his fellow scientists; if he did so some one would make the fact public and then, as I had said to Lemuel, Heaven help mankind. My head swam and I fairly trembled at thought of what would occur should my friend's secret fall into the hands of unprincipled men. Law, society, governments would be powerless. Possessing the power to become invisible, crooks could defy the world. They could loot banks, state treasuries, mints and

all other sources of hoarded millions, unseen, unhampered and leave no traces of their identity. Murder, robbery, rapine, any and all crime could be committed without fear of detection or punishment. Even if caught unawares and thrown into prison an invisible man could walk out without being seen. No walls could hold him, no court try him, no punishment be dealt him. And even if the secret were known to all, it would make little difference, unless, as Lemuel had seemed to think, a person invisible himself could see others when under the effect of the apparatus. The next instant I laughed out so loudly that passers-by turned and stared at me. What a fool I had been! How ridiculous my worry over any such possibility! I had forgotten about the marvelous glasses! My friend's secret might become public property and yet be harmless, even in the hands of the most desperate criminals. Just as there is an antidote for every poison, so Lemuel's magic glasses would safeguard the world from any evil that might result from his discovery. Moreover, there was always the chance that he would be unable to discover a means of rendering inorganic matter invisible, and if so, his invention would be of little value either to honest or dishonest men. At thought of the weird situations that might result, I chuckled. I could imagine a gunman, himself invisible holding up some citizen, and I could visualize the amazed expression of the victim as he saw a revolver suspended in mid-air and pointing at him, and heard a disembodied voice ordering him to throw up his hands. And it was amusing to picture motor cars, apparently empty, threading their way through traffic and stopping and starting at the signals of a visible whistle blown by an invisible traffic officer. Yes, one's imagination could run riot and nothing imagined could equal the reality if my friend's invention came into general use. And, no doubt, I had greatly overestimated the dangers and the undesirable features of the discovery. In all probability the invention, once it became known, would create little more excitement or wonder than had followed the invention of the telephone, the radio or any other epochal thing. People would take it as a matter of course and no greater harm would come of it than had resulted from the discovery of the steam engine, electricity, or any other revolutionary invention, all of which had been looked upon as inimical to the world and to mankind when they had been first announced.

At any rate, I could not afford to worry over Lemuel's affairs even if his marvelous achievement continually occupied my thoughts.

For several days I had not heard from Dr. Unsinn, and I was far too busy with my own work to visit him. No doubt he was deep in his experiments and I felt sure he would notify me when he had perfected anything new. And in this I was not mistaken. Answering my telephone, I was greeted by Lemuel's voice.

"I've got it!" he cried. "I've conquered inorganic matter. Everything is perfected! Can you come over at once?"

As on my previous visit, Miguel admitted me, and, as before, he requested me to wait for my friend in the library. But this time I was prepared and had no intention of being either frightened or amazed at anything Dr. Unsinn might spring on me. At least, I thought I was; but I had underestimated my friend's abilities and the astounding possibilities of his perfected discovery.

Standing before the old-fashioned fireplace, and listening intently for the slightest sound which might betray the approach of an invisible being, I peered about the room half expecting to see Lemuel materialize or to hear his bodiless voice speaking to me.

As I did so a thin fog or mist seemed to cloud my vision. I can best describe the sensation as similar to a "blind headache" from which I had at times suffered. I

could distinguish every object in the library, but everything appeared to be slightly out of focus. I rubbed my eyes and stared again. In the wall opposite where I stood a luminous spot appeared; other bright spots seemed to take form on the ceiling and the floor and on the other walls. Without doubt, I thought, I was in for a terrific headache, for such bright, luminous spots always appeared before my eyes when such an attack was coming on. And then a strange, a marvelous, an absolutely astounding and terrifying change took place. Floor, ceiling, walls; every object within the room melted away. It was exactly the effect that I had seen when a film or a lantern-slide is melted by the heat of the projection machine. One instant I was standing before the fireplace in Dr. Unsinn's library; the next instant I was in the centre of a blank, standing in a void. To the right, where a wall and two windows had been, was the broad, tree-shaded street with its electric lights and shadowy houses on the further side. Above me was space; below me intense, fathomless blackness. And yet, my feet rested on solid matter and as, too amazed and terrified even to cry out, I felt gropingly with my outstretched hands, my fingers touched the mantel and a nearby table with magazines that rustled at my touch. And then, instantly, I knew what had occurred. Incredible, utterly unbelievable as it seemed, I knew that Lemuel by his uncanny, his almost supernatural invention had amused himself and had demonstrated his powers by rendering the entire apartment invisible!

My fright gave way to absolute wonder. It was impossible but true, and feeling confident that I was right, I rather hesitatingly took a step forward. Never shall I forget the sensation. Surrounded by nothingness, as far as my vision went, suspended in mid-air, yet I was walking as securely, as firmly and on as solid a floor as ever. Reassured, I turned towards the street that stretched before me and far beneath me. As if in a dream I walked forward with arm extended, and, the next moment, banged with uncomfortable force against a solid wall. And at my involuntary expletive, Lemuel's hearty laughter came from behind me, and I staggered back as an invisible hand slapped my shoulders.

"It works!" exclaimed the voice. "It's the most wonderful discovery ever made by man!"

"And the most damnable way to wreck a man's nerves," I blurted out, as my hands came into contact with an invisible chair and I dropped weakly into it.

"Sorry I had to frighten you a bit," said my friend's voice. "But I wanted to test the matter thoroughly."

"If you want to keep my friendship, you'll turn off your confounded machine and get things back to normal," I replied testily.

"Oh, all right," agreed Lemuel, "but look here, old man, can't you wait a minute? I—"

"I'm looking here, there and everywhere," I exclaimed. "And there's nothing to see and I've had enough of this."

"Dash it all, then I was wrong after all," cried Dr. Unsinn. "I felt sure that while subject to the treatment one person could see another, and that while invisible a person could see objects invisible to others. Well, after all, it doesn't matter so much."

"You get things back to visibility again before you start lecturing," I commanded. "It's worse than a nightmare."

Before I had finished speaking I found myself once more amid the familiar surroundings of my friend's library with Lemuel seated, grinning triumphantly, in his favorite chair.

"You didn't give me enough time to test my theories thoroughly," he complained. "I wished to try the glasses again."

"You tested it enough to suit me and more," I said. "I'll take the glasses on your say-so. In fact, from now

on, I'll believe anything you say in regard to your discovery or invention or black magic or whatever it is. If you say you can make the entire universe invisible I'll not argue with you. But let me tell you it's lucky you didn't live a century or so ago. You'd be burned for a witch before now."

"You forget that it would be a difficult undertaking to burn an invisible being," he reminded me. "And just think how scared those witch-baiters would have been, if their stake and fire had suddenly vanished from before their eyes."

"And I'll wager that a lot of people will wish you *had* been executed before you made your devilish discovery," I told him.

"Not a bit of it!" he declared. "The world will welcome it and will acclaim me the greatest inventor and greatest benefactor of the human race."

"See here," I cried, all my old fears again possessing me, "won't you listen to reason and common sense? You're so carried away with your success that you haven't stopped to think what it would mean, if you let the world know of your invention. No, don't interrupt me, I've worried over this ever since I was here last, and I'm going to have it out with you here and now. I'll admit you've succeeded better than I expected or hoped, for if you had failed to make inorganic substances invisible your invention might not have been so dangerous. As it is, the possibilities for destroying life, property, society and mankind are too tremendous to even think of. Can't you see what it would mean if crooks got hold of it? Can't you see what it would mean if it fell into the hands of Bolsheviks, or revolutionists or governments? Why man, you'd upset the world, destroy civilization, wreak unspeakable woe and misery and terror."

"Piffle!" ejaculated Lemuel, "if everything and everybody was invisible the status of the world would remain unchanged. How could a criminal attack an invisible victim? Instead of facilitating crime it would deter crime. Instead of bringing on wars and destruction it would prevent such things. How could an army fight an invisible foe? How could a navy attack invisible ships? And invisible police and officers of law and order could apprehend criminals much more readily. Besides, you forget about my glasses. If the public or any part of the public possessed these, nothing would be invisible to the wearers."

"Idiotic reasoning," I declared. "Suppose someone stole or learned your secret? Suppose the agent of a hostile nation got hold of it? Or suppose some gang of criminals secured the invention by fair means or foul? Is it likely that they would let the world know of the glasses which counteract the process? No, every moment that you possess the apparatus for working your devilish trick, you're threatening your fellow men and civilization with annihilation. If you wish to benefit the world, destroy every calculation, every bit of apparatus, every trace of what you've done and never divulge a word of it."

"You're an old scare-head," said Lemuel, though I could see that my words had had their effect. "And," he continued, "I have no intention of following your advice. There is not the slightest danger of my discovery being found out unless you or I divulge it. I shall not,—for the present at least, and I know you will not. Moreover, even if it were known, no one could work it. The procedure is known only to myself."

"Anything one man has done another can repeat," I reminded him.

"Possibly," he admitted, "but to proceed with my statement. I am free to grant that certain things you have said are not without foundation. I had, in the beginning, expected to make my invention public, for of course it is impossible to patent it. Anyone could pirate the patent, and,

availing himself of his knowledge could render himself invisible and thus beyond reach of the law. But I may decide not to give my discovery to the world at large. It all depends upon future experiments and tests. And, if you really feel as you say in regard to it, "you'll help me to carry out my tests. If, in my judgment and in yours, these experiments prove the invention actually a peril to society then, I assure you, it will never be revealed to the public. But if, on the other hand, you, as well as myself, are convinced that the discovery will be beneficial rather than inimical, I shall let the world know the secret."

"Hmm, well I suppose that's fair enough," I assented. "But before I agree I want to know what these experiments are which you have in mind."

"Certainly," said Lemuel. "I intend to go about while invisible, accompanied by you equipped with the glasses, and from personal observation determine just what will or might happen, and whether the power to become invisible would be beneficial or otherwise."

"I don't see anything to object to in that," I assured him, "and I'll agree to help you, provided you agree not to do anything which might result in my being held responsible. Remember, I will be visible and you will not, and I'd hardly care to stand up in a police court and claim that an invisible companion was responsible for certain acts of which I was accused. No, Lemuel, I have no desire to end my days in an insane asylum."

"But, my dear boy," chuckled my friend, "that would be a splendid test, and of course I could always materialize at the last moment. Just imagine the effect on a policeman or a magistrate!"

"Yes *just* imagine it," I replied drily. "And unless you're willing to agree to my terms you can imagine your experiments without my aid."

"You take me far too seriously," exclaimed Lemuel. "I have no intention of overstepping the bounds of the law and I shall certainly so conduct my experiments that no blame can be attached to you. But," he added regretfully, "it would be much better if you also would submit to the effect of my device."

"Well, I won't and that's an end to that," I declared positively. "And," I continued, "there's another matter. You'll have to promise me that you will not try the experiment of making things invisible by wholesale,—no vanishing of rooms, buildings or other structures while occupied. A terrible panic might and most certainly would result. And this includes trolley cars, railway trains, moving vehicles and similar things. A panic is the easiest thing in the world to start and the hardest to stop."

"I promise," assented my friend, "but I shall most assuredly try my invention on unoccupied structures and other objects."

"I don't care what you try it on provided you do not endanger life or property," I told him.

"Then we'll start our experiment tomorrow," exclaimed Lemuel. "We'll start from your apartment. If convenient to you, I'll call at ten tomorrow morning."

CHAPTER IV

Dr. Unsinn's Experiment

I DO not know exactly what object Dr. Unsinn had in view, or what he hoped to accomplish by his "experiment." Certainly he had demonstrated his discovery and had proved it successful by his tests on myself. Possibly he felt that human sight might vary, that some persons might find him invisible while to others he was visible, or again, he may have wished merely to gratify his own vanity, and enjoy the sensation of moving unseen among his fellows. He could not, in fact, clearly explain to me

what he expected or why he was so insistent upon having me accompany him, when, as we had agreed, we set out from my apartment. But in view of the events which followed I feel sure that it was fate or predestination that led him to undertake his experiment.

Wearing the marvelous glasses, in order that I might not lose sight of my companion, who had rendered himself invisible, I hailed an approaching trolley car. But habit is a strong and persistent thing, and the human mind is greatly governed by the impressions it receives through the eyes, and, at the very outset of our venture I learned this to my chagrin. Boarding the car with Lemuel at my heels, I handed the conductor a dime and he returned a nickel in change. I was on the point of handing it back, and the word "two" was on the tip of my tongue when a nudge from Lemuel's elbow brought me to my senses. As my friend was plainly visible to me I had completely forgotten that he was invisible to the conductor, and I mentally vowed to watch my step more closely in the future. There were few passengers in the car and my companion seated himself in one corner while I took the seat beside him. And presently habit once again came to the fore and came near to getting me into a most embarrassing situation. Quite forgetting, momentarily, that my friend was invisible, I spoke to him, and he, quite in his ordinary manner, replied. In fact we were carrying on quite an animated conversation when I was suddenly brought to a realization of what we were doing by the behavior of the other passengers. Everyone was gazing at me. Some curiously, others half pityingly, as if thinking me either mad or intoxicated, while still others were grinning and thoroughly enjoying the spectacle of a man carrying on a conversation with himself. Even the conductor had entered the car and was staring at me, a strangely puzzled expression on his face, as if undecided whether I was a dangerous lunatic or a common drunk. Fortunately, my presence of mind came to my rescue, and, flushing, but forcing a smile, I turned to an intelligent appearing gentleman near me. "I must apologize for my absent-mindedness," I stammered. "I was merely practising a bit of ventriloquism for my act, and inadvertently spoke aloud."

This lame explanation appeared to satisfy everyone. The passengers resumed their former occupations of staring vacantly out of the windows, reading their papers, or gazing absently at the advertising placards within the car, while the conductor, evidently relieved, betook himself again to the rear platform.

By now, however, the experiment was getting on my nerves. I had feared that my friend's absent-mindedness might lead him into trouble and yet, by my own thoughtless actions, I had twice within a few moments barely escaped getting into deep water. And the fact that I could not speak my mind to my invisible companion, and that I had pledged myself to see the experiment through, only added to my irritation. As, inwardly fuming, I resolved to keep my mind constantly alert to avoid further embarrassment, the car came to a stop and a stout, pompous and overdressed middle-aged woman entered. As the car started with a jerk she lurched forward, and, before I realized her intention, she plumped herself into the apparently vacant seat beside me. A grunt from my invisible friend, and a terrific shriek from the stout female instantly followed, and, as if bounced from a spring, she sprang up, her eyes blazing, her face white with indignation and fairly shouting a torrent of abuse as she shook her beringed fist in my face.

"Brute! Disreputable old rake!" she screamed, "I'll have you jailed! I'll have you imprisoned!"

Instantly the car was in an uproar. Passengers crowded forward; necks were craned; everyone talked at once,

and the conductor pushed his burly figure between the irate female and myself.

"Hey, what's the game?" he demanded. "What did this guy do to yer, lady?"

"He obtruded himself beneath me,—the unspeakable fiend!" she shrieked. "He endeavored to embrace me and pinched me."

"I did nothing of the sort," I declared, fairly shouting to make myself heard. "—"

"Tell it to the judge," interrupted the conductor, stepping towards me.

Fortunately for me the gentleman to whom I had offered my ventriloquistic explanation, now intervened in my behalf.

"The lady is mistaken," he declared, rising and restraining the conductor. "I was observing her and this gentleman closely. She seated herself in the vacant seat and this gentleman did not move. Possibly—"

"Yeah, the old guy's right," chimed in a greasy mechanic opposite. "He never done nothin'. The dame's nutty. What guy'd want her to squat in his lap?"

Instantly the woman's wrath was turned on this new victim, but before violence could be done the conductor intervened. "Hey, quit this roughhouse stuff," he ordered. "If youse want to fight take it outside. Guess you're in wrong, lady. Sit down, or get off and call a cop."

Still glaring, and voicing her opinions of everyone, and especially of me, she again descended ponderously to Lemuel's seat.

An involuntary exclamation escaped my lips, but it was uncalled for. During the excitement, Dr. Unsinn had risen and had slipped unseen to the rear platform where he was beckoning to me wildly.

Only too glad to escape, I rose and joined him and, as the car came to a halt, we stepped off.

"Confound the woman!" he exclaimed the moment we were alone. "She very nearly fractured my thighs. You would have gotten us into a nice fix if she had. How could a doctor set an invisible bone? And the apparatus in my pocket might have been ruined so that I could not have regained my visible form. You'll have to be more careful in future. Why didn't you stop her or warn me?"

For an instant I was too amazed at his outburst to speak. So he, too, was blaming me for all the trouble. This was too much.

"Look here!" I cried, "I've had enough of this. You're as well able to take care of yourself while invisible as when visible. If you're going to depend on me to keep you out of trouble I'll quit and you can go ahead with your damnable experiment alone. And you talk about getting into trouble! You're safe and I'm the goat every time. Think it's fun for me to be called names and threatened with arrest? I'd look nice trying to explain matters to the police or the judge, wouldn't I?"

"Lemuel chuckled. "Come, come," he exclaimed, placing his hand on my arm. "I didn't mean to have you take it that way, old man. But we'll both have to be a trifle more circumspect in future. And, really, it *was* most amusing. Now I propose taking a taxi hereafter. I am convinced that trolley cars are not suitable conveyances for me in conducting my tests. But the test was most conclusive after all."

By now the humor of the incident had outweighed the more serious side of the affair in my mind, and I laughed heartily with Lemuel as we waited at the corner for an empty taxi to approach.

Within the vehicle we could converse freely for the noise of the motor and the surrounding traffic prevented the driver from hearing our voices.

Lemuel, elated at the success of his experiments, was now becoming reckless and suggested that it would be most

interesting and amusing to render the taxi and ourselves invisible. But I sternly forbade it. "You're an idiot," I declared, "we could be maimed or killed even if we were invisible. Don't you realize we'd be in a wreck within ten seconds? If you make any more such crazy suggestions I'll see that you're placed in a lunatic asylum."

"Easier said than done," he reminded me, "but, all joking aside, I must try the effect on something more than myself. Ah, I have it! Stop the cab, will you?"

As he had been speaking we had passed a huge office building in course of erection and as I paid the taxi driver, Lemuel was gazing appraisingly at the towering structure of steel and stone.

"A splendid opportunity!" he cried enthusiastically. "Possibly my pocket apparatus may not have sufficient power but—"

"Confound you!" I cried. "Didn't you promise me you wouldn't try your invention on any structure?"

"I did not," he declared decisively. "I merely agreed not to render invisible any structure containing human occupants. This building is vacant. A strike is in progress and the place is deserted."

"Well, you promised not to do anything which would cause a panic or trouble," I persisted.

"And I intend to keep my promise," he replied. "I shall defer my experiment until the noon hour when the streets will be practically deserted, and there can be no panic. And I fail to see how it can cause any trouble."

All arguments which I could offer were in vain, and, I must confess, I was rather fascinated by my friend's suggestion. To cause a towering steel and stone structure to vanish would, indeed, be a feat—if it could be done, and I was anxious to find what the effect on the public would be. But as it was still nearly two hours before noon we resumed our way, with Lemuel seeking new opportunities to test his discovery on the public.

The sidewalks were thronged with shoppers, and presently, as we pushed our way through the crowd, a terrified shriek pierced the hum and noises of the busy street, as my companion, either accidentally or thoughtlessly, bumped into a passing woman. As she collapsed in a faint I sprang forward; but Dr. Unsinn was before me. Completely forgetting that he was invisible, he stooped down, raised the victim's head and then, lifting her in his arms, started for a nearby drug store. Instantly pandemonium broke loose. Screams, shouts, frightened cries rose from the crowd which had quickly gathered, and awed, unable to believe their eyes, men, women and children shoved, crowded, and fought to make way for the woman's form floating in air through their midst. For a moment my heart seemed to cease beating. All my fears appeared about to be justified. In an instant there would be a panic with crushed and trampled bodies and all the attendant horrors. But for once the impending catastrophe was stayed by the very panic and terror of the crowd. So intent were the people on the incredible sight which had terrified them that they stood as if turned to stone, petrified with amazement and fear.

And then a still more incredible thing happened. The woman's body suddenly vanished! Lemuel had bethought himself, and, undoubtedly confused at the conditions he had created, had tried to improve matters by rendering his victim invisible. And the seemingly supernatural occurrences had been witnessed by myself as well as by the crowd, for, in the melee the glasses had been wrenched from my nose and were hanging, dangling, useless and temporarily forgotten from my breast pocket. And as the woman's form vanished, a strange sound, half sigh, half groan, arose from the gaping multitude. Before hundreds of eyes the impossible had taken place. A woman had fainted, without reason or cause she had risen and had floated through

the air and had utterly vanished in the midst of the crowd. For an instant they remained spellbound, awed into absolute silence. And in that instant Lemuel had entered the drug store with his burden and had deposited her gently but hurriedly upon a chair, where, as instantaneously as she had vanished, she again resumed her customary form. As every occupant of the shop had rushed to the doors and windows to see what was taking place on the street, nobody noticed the sudden reappearance of the woman. To me it was all nearly as surprising as to the public, but I had sense enough left to hastily don my glasses, as Lemuel slipped past the white-clad employees of the store, and, taking care not to collide with another bystander, rejoined me.

We had no desire to linger and see the results of the affair, and hurried from the crowd and turned into a nearby cross street. I could scarcely berate my friend for what had occurred, for it had been an unavoidable accident, but I did not hesitate to use it as an example of the dire results which might follow if he kept on with this experiment or made his secret public.

Lemuel was, however, far more excited and disturbed than I, and without even attempting to reply he rushed into a subway entrance. Without stopping to think he hurried to the change booth and thrust a quarter under the wicket. Without glancing up, the occupant shoved back five nickels, and my friend gathered them up. But as the coins slid from the wooden shelf and vanished without apparent reason, and with no human hand grasping them, the man peered from his cage. An expression of mortal terror swept across his stolid features, and, with an inarticulate, choking cry, he reeled backward from his stool. But Lemuel did not stop. The events of the past few minutes had completely upset him, and the scientific mind when upset often becomes panicky. For the moment he had, no doubt, completely forgotten that he was invisible, and, rushing forward, he boarded the train with me at his heels. Fortunately it was a dull hour for the subway—my friend was not forced to jostle or push his way, which most assuredly would have resulted in further troubles—less than half a dozen passengers were within the car which we entered. Lemuel sat silent, evidently composing his thoughts, and fumbling in one of his pockets. The next moment a terrified shout reechoed through the car; a woman fainted; the guard appeared at the door; there was the hissing of released air, and the train came to a jolting, lurching stop. I had a premonition of what had occurred, and, snatching off the pink glasses, I found my worst fears more than fulfilled. The car and its occupants had completely disappeared! With eyes fairly popping from their sockets, mouth agape, and shaking as if with ague, the guard stood on the platform of the next car, staring, utterly aghast, at the void that stretched between him and the car ahead. Reason and instinct told him it was impossible, but his senses told him that a car had completely vanished while speeding at fifty miles an hour, and had taken its passengers along with it. So thoroughly frightened and flabbergasted was the guard that even Lemuel's voice, issuing from space, failed to attract his attention.

"Confound the thing!" exclaimed my companion, "I must have pressed the wrong button, or it may have been shifted when I carried that fainting woman. Likely as not it was injured when that miserable creature seated herself in my lap. Now—"

"My God, man! Can't you do something?" I cried, visions of the car and its occupants remaining forever invisible flashing through my mind.

Then, as instantaneously and unexpectedly as it had vanished, the car was once more in the train. It had all occurred in a few seconds, and the bewildered passengers

stared about, rubbing their eyes as if awakening from a dream, while the guard, blinking and muttering, jerked the signal cord and the train again rumbled on.

Fortunately for all concerned, Dr. Unsinn had managed to get his devilish machine to function properly, and no harm had come of the incident, but I had had about enough of it all, and I feared that at any moment, the apparatus might fail entirely or might do the wrong thing. At the next stop I left the train, forcing my friend along with me, and, dragging him into an obscure corner of the station platform where there was no chance of being overheard, I expressed my view of his experiment in no gentle terms.

"You can't expect a delicate device to withstand two hundred and fifty pounds of feminine flesh and bone, can you?" he demanded. "I'm not surprised that it was temporarily disarranged. But it's entirely right now. If you don't believe it I'll demonstrate it right here."

"Don't you dare!" I exclaimed. "You'll resume your normal form as a demonstration, and we'll go to lunch. Then back to my apartments and no more of this experiment. You've caused enough trouble for one day and I'll have a nervous breakdown if this sort of thing continues."

"I'll agree on one condition," replied Lemuel with more readiness than I had expected. "I'm determined to try my experiment on that unfinished building. After that I'll cease my experiment for today."

In vain I argued. Lemuel could be as obstinate as a mule at times, and, at last, realizing that he was bound to carry out his desires and that if I left him he might bring about dire results when alone, I assented to his condition.

So, with Dr. Unsinn once more his usual self, we found a quiet restaurant where I was accustomed to dining. The waiter, having taken our order, handed me a copy of the latest edition of a paper, and, half fearfully, I glanced through it, expecting to find an account of one or more of the strange occurrences for which we had been responsible. But nothing had appeared, and I decided that, in all probability, the witnesses had not cared to report an experience which would expose them to ridicule and a suspicion of insanity.

Lemuel was in high spirits. To be sure, he had made one or two mistakes, but each case, as he put it, added to the value of his experiment and of his observations. And he could not resist crowing over me a bit when he called my attention to the fact that neither panic nor disasters had resulted.

"It is exactly as I foresaw," he declared. "The entirely new and unknown does not terrorize human beings. Wonder and amazement temporarily paralyze the muscles, and, as you should know, two opposed impressions cannot occupy the mind at the same time. Hence fear cannot have a place where wonder is predominant."

"No, my friend, your fears of my discovery creating a panic or causing terror and shock are absolutely unfounded."

"You forget about the woman who fainted, and the man in the subway," I reminded him.

"Utterly beside the question," he snorted. "In the case of the woman it was bodily contact which frightened her, and, in the other case, the fact that the money vanished. In neither case was it due to fright at my invisibility."

"It's hopeless to argue with you," I said. "Indirectly, your invisibility was at the bottom of it, and Heaven alone knows what a panic might have resulted if that car had remained invisible long enough for the passengers of the other cars to have investigated the cause of the train stopping."

"I can and shall prove I am right," he declared. "Come, we'll have a try at that building and I'll wager no one will be terrified."

"For Heaven's sake, don't vanish here!" I cried, as I saw Lemuel reach towards an inner pocket. "Wait until we are alone. I'd suggest a telephone booth as the most convenient and safest spot."

A few moments later my friend entered a booth, and almost instantly emerged, visible only to myself. Hailing a taxi, we were soon in the vicinity of the partly completed Hartwell Building. It was the lunch hour and very few persons were on the street. Opposite the building a chauffeur dozed in his taxi, two fruit vendors argued in vociferous Italian on the corner, and a few pedestrians who had dined early were wandering about gazing into shop windows. Entering the main doorway of the building we found ourselves in the spacious rotunda with its litter of discarded building materials and abandoned scaffoldings.

"Ah, here we are!" exclaimed Lemuel gleefully. "Now, if my pocket apparatus can produce results on *this* edifice I shall feel that nothing is too great to be rendered invisible. Entire armies, navies, cities, yes—"

"Then I hope it doesn't work," I interrupted.

But my hopes were in vain. As Lemuel had been speaking, he had adjusted his instrument and scarcely had my last word been uttered, when the twenty stories of concrete, steel and stone dissolved about us, leaving us, invisible to others, standing in air above the yawning abyss of the foundation excavation.

For a brief instant no one within sight appeared to notice that the structure had vanished. Then the dozing chauffeur jerked upright, his jaw sagged, and with a wild yell he sat transfixed, pointing dramatically at the empty lot where the building had stood. At his cry everyone on the street turned. Shouts and exclamations drew occupants of stores and restaurants on the run. With screeching horns taxis came tearing into the street, and in almost no time Nineteenth Street was filled with a gaping, gesticulating, excited crowd.

"Didn't I tell you so?" cried Lemuel triumphantly. "No one is frightened. All—" His words were cut short by the clanging of a bell as a patrol wagon came dashing around a corner, while from the opposite direction, the screaming siren of a fire truck added to the uproar.

"Quick!" I cried, "Someone's called the police and turned in a fire alarm. In a minute they'll be here. They'll find us and there'll be the devil to pay!"

Lemuel roared with glee. "You forget we're invisible," he reminded me. "And it will be highly amusing to witness the reactions of the police and firemen when they find solid walls where obviously there are none. And imagine the results when those who succeed in entering vanish instantly."

"Turn off the damnable machine instantly," I commanded him, "this has gone far enough."

The police and firemen were advancing towards us, hesitatingly but determined, although what they expected to accomplish or why they imagined their services were required, is still a mystery to me. As I have said before, habit is one of the strongest of influences. Dr. Unsinn, being a great respecter of law, and seeing the police approaching, succumbed to force of habit and almost involuntarily stopped his mechanism. Instantly the huge building once more towered above the street, and with a hoarse cry of warning and alarm, the crowd broke and fled, seeking refuge in doorways and stores as if fearing the structure might crash thundering into the street. Even the police sprang back, but the firemen, to their credit be it said, stood their ground, and, thinking something was expected of them, turned half a dozen streams of water on the buildings. In the excitement Lemuel and I slipped

unseen from a rear entrance and hurried from sight around a corner.

Despite all my experiences with my friend's discovery I was shaken and upset by this latest demonstration of his power, and even Lemuel was, I could see, in a highly excitable frame of mind. His device had exceeded even his most sanguine expectations and his experiment had, from his point of view, been a huge success.

Several times he started to speak, but each time I checked him, for the sidewalks were thronged with pedestrians and I had no desire to have attention turned towards us after our latest achievement.

We were now in a shopping district, and as we walked along, picking our way with care in order that Lemuel might not jostle some passer-by, I noticed a rough-looking, heavily-built fellow loitering near the edge of the sidewalk and furtively glancing at each woman who passed him. Suddenly he darted forward, snatched a handbag from a stylishly-dressed girl, and dashed up the street. Screaming that she had been robbed, the girl started after him. Cries of "Stop thief!" resounded from every side, and a score of persons turned and gave chase. Lemuel and I had been nearest to the fellow, and with one accord we were after him, quite forgetting that one of us was invisible. Dashing around the corner, the rascal entered an almost deserted side street with us at his heels and the howling mob half a block in the rear. In my youth I had been something of a runner, and Lemuel had, it flashed upon me, won the coveted "S" of our university as a sprinter. Rapidly we gained upon the fellow, and, as he turned to duck into an alleyway, Lemuel grasped him by the coat with a command to halt.

Instantly, and without stopping, the fellow half turned and dealt a vicious, back-handed blow with his doubled fist. It caught Lemuel full in the face, and with a gasping cry he staggered back into my arms with a two inch gash laying bare the cheek bone and blood gushing from the wound. But even at that moment, while supporting my injured comrade, my attention was focussed upon the ruffian who had struck him down. Feeling the impact of his fist upon a fellow-being's flesh, he had wheeled, and, the next moment, stood rooted to the spot.

Instead of a form stretched on the pavement or a battered man staggering back, not a living soul was near with the exception of myself. The fellow's eyes grew wide, his mouth opened, and the next moment he uttered a terrified scream, and dropping the hand-bag fell to his knees, covering his eyes with his hands, babbling incoherently, and shaking with mortal fear. Upon the flagging before me was a blotch of blood, and, from nowhere, drops of blood were slowly adding to the crimson pool. Lemuel might be invisible but the blood from his wound was not. To the cowering, superstitious wretch, the blood, slowly dripping from an unseen victim, must have been a most awful and terrifying sight.

The oncoming mob now was nearly upon us, and, a dozen fears swept through my confused brain. What if the blood stains on the pavement attracted attention and an explanation were demanded? What would happen to my invisible companion, as the mob, dashing onward, bore him down and trampled him under foot? And what if the cowering wretch before us blurted out the truth? But I need not have worried. So intent were the man-chasers upon their quarry that they gave no heed even to me, and in a moment, the red blotch was completely obliterated by scores of feet, as the crowd surrounded us and seized the thief who offered no resistance. And almost by a miracle Dr. Unsinn escaped the fate I had feared. I sprang behind him as the mob reached us and thus partially shielded him, but despite this, the shouting, panting, perspiring crowd jostled and bumped him, tearing his coat half from

his shoulders, knocking his spectacles into the street where they were instantly ground to bits underfoot, tearing his collar awry, knocking off his hat and, as I knew from his half-stifled grunts, exclamations and ejaculations, giving him many a painful jab and bump with elbows and shoulders. But in that hub-bub, the cries of any man were inaudible, and as everyone jostled and pushed his neighbor no one noticed that an invisible but solid human form was in their midst. Luckily the mob surged forward around the thief and left a fairly clear space through which I half-dragged, half-pushed my battered, bruised and dishevelled comrade.

Attracted by the commotion, half a dozen taxis had drawn up to the curb, their drivers craning their necks and peering into the milling crowd about the captive, and giving no heed to anything else. Quickly opening the door of the nearest, I bundled Lemuel inside, and, at last succeeding in gaining the chauffeur's attention, I ordered him to drive off. He turned with a half-uttered oath and refused to move, but noticing my own rumpled appearance, and realizing I had been in the thick of the trouble, his tone changed and he asked what it was all about. In a few words I explained that it was merely a purse-snatcher, and that I had been knocked over in the mêlée. For an instant he gazed suspiciously at me, for my hands were a bit smeared with Lemuel's blood, and for a brief instant I trembled for fear he would drive us to the nearest police station. But he had lost interest in the crowd and excitement, and as I suggestively showed him a ten dollar bill, he grinned knowingly, threw in the gears and with loudly honking horn headed uptown as I had directed.

Hastily bandaging Lemuel's face with my handkerchief to prevent any further complications arising over blood dripping on the taxi seat or floor, and half-supporting him, for he was still dazed and groggy and without his glasses was almost as blind as a bat, I fanned him with my hat.

Presently he showed signs of recovering, took several deep breaths of relief and ruefully felt of his various bumps, contusions and bruises. Then, with a groan, he remarked: "Whew, that fellow packed an awful punch!"

"Ycs" I agreed, "and obviously the fact that you are invisible does not prevent you from getting hurt."

"Nor from suffering," mumbled my companion, "I'm positive my jaw is fractured."

"Don't try to talk," I said. "I'd take you to a hospital or a doctor's office, but you'd have to be visible and you're in no fit shape to materialize in public. You look like a butchery."

By the time we reached my apartments Lemuel was near a collapse and was, I knew, suffering intensely. But he was still game, and with but little assistance walked up the steps and into my rooms where he instantly dropped upon a couch.

"Now, if you're able to, and the confounded thing isn't out of order, get back to your normal state," I commanded him. "I'll have my doctor here in a moment, but you've got to be visible first."

I was greatly worried for fear that Lemuel might faint or lose consciousness before he could restore himself to visibility, and I was so perturbed and excited that it never occurred to me that, even if he remained invisible, I could give the glasses to the physician and thus enable him to attend to my friend's injuries. However, to my relief, Lemuel fumbled with his mechanism, and presently was once more visible to unaided human eyes. And not an instant too soon. He had exhausted his last strength in operating the device which dropped to the floor as consciousness left him.

Fortunately, my doctor lived less than a block distant, and, still more fortunately, he was in his office. Within

five minutes he was bending over Dr. Unsinn, and, being as all doctors should be, a most discreet man, he forbore to make embarrassing inquiries as to the manner in which Lemuel had received the wounds.

To my intense relief he assured me that there was no fracture and no injuries more serious than the one deep gash and severe contusions.

Lemuel regained consciousness as the doctor was bandaging the wound, but he made no attempt to speak, and, for that matter, his face was too swollen and painful to permit him to utter an intelligible word for the next twenty-four hours.

In the meantime we eagerly bought and read the papers which were filled with accounts of the Hartwell Building mystery, and I could see by Lemuel's expression, even through his bandages, that he was immensely pleased at the attention his feat had attracted. There were also items regarding our, or rather Lemuel's other exploits. A score of persons had reported the incident of the fainting woman; the man in the subway station had related his experience, but not a word appeared in print regarding the sudden vanishing of the car. No doubt the guard hesitated to mention or report the matter fearing that his superiors might, quite reasonably, feel that a guard subject to such hallucinations was unfit for his position. And, in all probability, the passengers who had been present and who, the chances were, had spoken to the guard after our departure, were convinced that they had been subjected to some optical illusion.

And of course there was no reference to the thief-chase or Lemuel's injuries, for the thief alone had seen anything out of the ordinary.

And of course no one had suspected our connection with all the phenomena, for which I was extremely thankful, although it did not please Lemuel, who declared, somewhat pcevishly that he had received no credit for his astounding discovery.

"Credit!" I exclaimed, "If the police knew you were at the bottom of these things you'd very probably be in jail by now."

"And," I continued, "I hope this last experience of yours has convinced you that I was right and that your discovery is a menace. If you take my advice you'll destroy every one of your formulae and every confounded contraption that has to do with the invention."

A wry grin twisted Dr. Unsinn's plastered and bandaged face. "No," he declared, "I shall destroy nothing. But I must admit that I have found my discovery is not so beneficial to the individual or the public at large as I had hoped. It is, I fear, too vast in its possibilities to be given to the world as I had planned. But I still am positive that it is a most important discovery and, if properly employed, will be of incalculable benefit to the world. No, instead of destroying it as you suggest, I shall present it to our government with the understanding that it shall remain a secret until needed to avert some national calamity."

I breathed a sigh of deep relief. "In that case," I replied, "your invention is as good as destroyed."

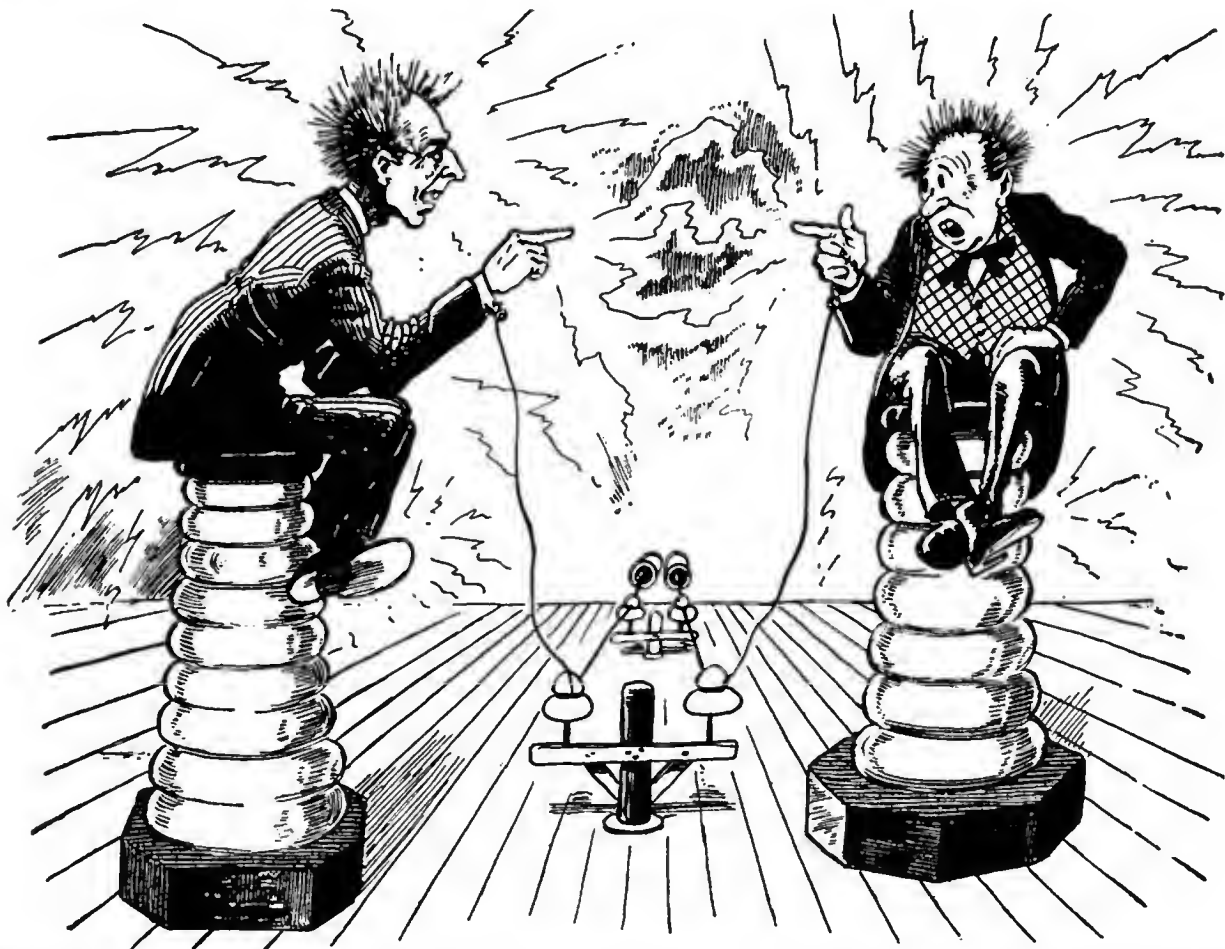
THE END.



The SCIENTIFIC ADVENTURES of MR. FOSDICK

By *Jacque Morgan*

The FELINE LIGHT and POWER COMPANY is ORGANIZED



Mr. Fosdick and Mr. Steele are now living on two insulated stools in the laboratory of Doolittle College. Their potential is dropping at the rate of ten volts a day.

JASON Q. FOSDICK closed the book that he had received by mail that morning, "Electricity at a Glance," and for a long time stared at the blank wall of the tinshop. Mr. Fosdick was thinking. Mr. Fosdick spent a great deal of his time in thought—probably most of his time. It was a common saying in Whiffleville that "When Mr. Fosdick gets through his thinking something is going to happen!" And in this the citizens were never disappointed, for invariably when Mr. Fosdick did get through his thinking something always did happen. Everybody liked the homely little man with the kindly face and the mild eyes, and in all the countryside none enjoyed a greater confidence and respect than Mr. Fosdick, for he was an inventor and genius. In all matters pertaining to science he was the village authority—even a greater authority than old Professor Snooks,

the fiercely bewhiskered savant of Doolittle College up on the hill. Snooks had once called him "a doddering tinker," but this Mr. Fosdick attributed to jealousy as did all the inhabitants of Whiffleville, for the Professor was a pompous man and an unpopular one. No fair-minded person could doubt Mr. Fosdick's versatility in the arts and crafts, for upon the signboard that hung over the sidewalk, in front of the door of the tinshop, was lettered his many accomplishments:

JASON QUINCY FOSDICK
*Tinsmith, Key-Fitter
and Scissors-Grinder*

As an inventor Mr. Fosdick had achieved great success. True, his patent corkscrew had never drawn a cork, but it had made a fair hairpin, and he had disposed of it as such for a dignified sum. His patent

SCIENCE is not the dry thing that some people would like us to believe. Mr. Fosdick, in this captivating tale, demonstrates this most aptly. Did you ever stroke a cat in the dark, and watch the sparks leap between your hand and the cat's fur? Perhaps you did. But it remained for the illustrious Fosdick to commercialize this great inherent power. The results were most amazing, as the readers will soon find out.

Starting with a single cat, highly charged with electricity, see what a catastrophe—no pun intended—he brings upon himself. There is only one point we missed and that is "What electrode in the experiment was the CATHode?"

pump refused flatly to perform the duty for which it had been designed, but it turned out to be an excellent churn

and the favorite creature of his inventive brain, his patent curling iron, was in service in countless homes throughout the broad land as a nut-cracker.

AS Mr. Fosdick gazed abstractedly at the bare wall in front of him he beetled his brows after the manner of all geniuses when concentrating their minds upon some great and suddenly discovered phenomenon in the wonderful world of science. And the thing that immersed him so deep in thought was a sentence that he had just read in the book. Many would have passed it by, but Mr. Fosdick's eyes had no sooner fallen on the lines of type—less than a score of words in all—than it immediately revealed to him a wide field of experimental research and one replete with thrilling possibilities. The momentous truth as told in the single, short and unobtrusive sentence was: "Static electricity may be generated by rubbing together such substances as resin and fur." Little did Mr. Fosdick at the time suspect that his stumbling upon this bit of elementary science was to result in focusing upon him the fierce limelight of international publicity and to make Whiffleville, for a brief forty-eight hours, the breathless topic of conversation throughout the civilized world.

Fully an hour passed. The noon whistle blew at Eben Stetzle's chop mill announcing to all Whiffleville the arrival of the dinner hour, and then Mr. Fosdick with the sigh of a tired man arose from his chair and started to close the shop. Had he followed out his intention this story would never have been written; but just as he was about to lock the front door there happened one of those strange and inexplicable things that so often change the destiny of men and nations—a large black cat walked across the threshold and sniffed contemptuously at Mr. Fosdick's shins!

Mr. Fosdick stared at the cat for a full minute and then he slowly put the key back in his pocket. "It's John L.!" he exclaimed. "By thunder, I'll try it!"

Pulling out a drawer of the workbench he, after fumbling about in a bushel or so of wheels, springs, screw-eyes and other odds and ends so dear to the hearts of all geniuses, eventually drew forth a large chunk of resin. And then picking up the unsuspecting John L.—so named after a highly successful pugilist on account of his extremely beligerent disposition—he placed the cat upon the bench and began to gently stroke him fore and aft with the resin. Slowly the hair upon the cat's back began to rise and in a few minutes John L. had apparently grown to twice his normal size. No astronomer discovering some hitherto unknown planet—no mother gazing with loving eyes, at her first born, ever experienced the rapturous tumult of feelings that suffused Mr. Fosdick as he watched the rapidly expanding John L. Quickly wrapping a piece of copper wire around a water pipe, Mr. Fosdick with eyes burning with the excitement of the experiment, slowly pushed the other end of the wire in the direction of John L.'s nose. Suddenly and without warning there was a loud cracking sound, a hot blue flame shot out from the cat's nose to the end of the wire, and John L., with a wild cry of rage, leaped some dozen feet in the air, and coming down, executed a neat right and left scratch upon the inventor's face; then with a single bound sprang through the door.

"By Jinks!" cried Fosdick. "She works—she works—she works!"

LESS than a week after Mr. Fosdick had made his experiment, all Whiffleville was thrown into a turmoil of excitement by the erection of a mysterious crib-like structure back of his tinshop. Only a chosen few knew the purpose of the strange building, and they, Eben Stetzle and five other friends and admirers of Mr. Fosdick, maintained a sphynx-like silence. In fact these men, having paid in ten

dollars apiece to Mr. Fosdick, constituted the stockholders and the first board of directors of *The Feline Light and Power Co.*

The plan of organization was broad and comprehensive. *The Feline Light and Power Co.* was to be the parent company. Mr. Fosdick assured the directors that it should, by virtue of the ownership of basic patents which he was sure to obtain, control all the other companies that would spring up throughout the country, just as soon as the parent company had demonstrated the success of the new method of power generation.

Briefly, the new power plant consisted of a room hardly larger than a piano box elevated some three feet from the ground by insulating pillars of glazed brick. The floor and the walls of the room were coated with a four-inch lining of pure resin. Into this room a "plurality of cats," so the patent application read, "were to be liberated therein by dropping them through the trap door (A) to the resin-covered floor (B) upon which surface they will conduct themselves in the manner hereinafter described." The prospectus which Mr. Fosdick had already started to work upon told in simpler language that the friction of the cats against the surface of the resin would generate electricity, which would be conveyed to consumers within a radius of ten miles—and possibly to the street railway and light stations in the city, fifty miles distant. Eben Stetzle was the first to foresee that there would be an immediate market for cats and secretly he and his brother-in-law set about organizing a cat-breeding corporation under the laws of New Jersey to be known as "The General Feline Co., Limited."

IT took some pretty hard hustling upon the part of the directorate, but by the time the power house was completed twenty "units," as Mr. Fosdick called them, had been lured from as many back yards and for a day languished in the back room of the tinshop. In the evening, when night had thrown its shade over Whiffleville and left the world in darkness to Mr. Fosdick and his cats, as Mr. Thomas Gray would doubtlessly have written, had he thought about it when composing his famous elegy—at any rate it was after dark when Mr. Fosdick stole out of the tinshop and one by one dropped his units through the trapdoor of the power house roof. Twenty trips he made and twenty units were installed. Then he listened intently—there was not a sound. With a heart sickened with the apprehension of failure, Mr. Fosdick made one more journey back to the tinshop and reappeared this time with John L.—the "exciter," as he afterwards called him. Hardly had he dropped the hero of a thousand back-fence encounters into the dark and silent hole than things began to happen. Such a bedlam of yowling and caterwauling Whiffleville had never heard—the plant was in operation.

The next morning when President Fosdick and the other officers and directors of "*The Feline Light and Power Company*" elbowed their way through the crowd of curious citizens that had gathered about the power house it was evident from the noise that came from the units inside that the charging process was still in progress. With some trepidation they mounted the ladder and looked down into the generating room. A strange and wonderful sight met their gaze. Twenty-one cats, each of them the size of a beer keg, were fighting each other in a grand battle royal. Their hair stood straight out and sparks played over dully luminous bodies incessantly. The crackling noise of electrical discharges was continuous and the peculiar odor of ozone filled the air. The directors were awed.

QUICKLY handing Vice-President Stetzle the voltmeter he had brought with him, Mr. Fosdick slipped down into the room. Picking up a unit he handed it up through the door for more thorough examination. But the unit did

not propose being examined. With a yowl of rage it sank its teeth into the vice-president's arm and then with a loud and furious hiss leaped to the ground. Upon just what happened then none could ever agree. Stetzle afterwards described the explosion as being like that of the sudden eruption of a volcano, other spectators when brought to their senses were sure there had been an earthquake. But Mr. Fosdick with his calm, unemotional mind of a born investigator believed neither of these theories. He saw the cat as it touched the ground—saw the sudden flare of blue fire—heard the tremendous report—saw the unit disappear in a dense cloud of white smoke, and afterwards identified all that was left of it—small patch of fur about the size of a dime—probably an ear.

Hardly had the breeze wafted the dust and smoke aside when Mr. Fosdick became aware of a strange and startling phenomenon—his hair and whiskers stood out from his head and face like the quills of a porcupine. Mr. Stetzle was similarly affected.

"Don't touch the ground, Eben!" shouted Mr. Fosdick warningly. "If you do you will blow up like the cat did. We're charged with millions of volts!"

It was a terrible situation and the two men looked anxiously about for assistance, but the frightened spectators had fled to that haven safety and gossip—the postoffice.

EXCITEMENT was at fever heat in the town. All sorts of rumors filled the air, and the telegraph was sending them to the remotest corners of the earth. Before noon extras were upon the streets of a score of cities telling in columns and columns of the terrible catastrophe and giving illustrations of it "Drawn by our special artist upon the ground."

All day long the two terrorized men cowered in the generating room. Outside at a safe distance a great crowd gathered. No one dared go near and it was generally believed that the unfortunate Fosdick and Stetzle must eventually starve to death. During the afternoon correspondents from the great city dailies poured in on every train and camera men clicked their instruments about "the death shed" in shoals. Towards evening it became known that the casualties were "one cat dead and two men electrified."

About supper time Prof. Snooks arrived, and it was owing to his suggestions to have food passed to them at the end of long glass poles that the men were saved from starvation.

In the generating room life was well nigh insufferable. The constant electrical discharges were irritating in the extreme and both men and units were in a vicious humor. It must be said, however, that President Fosdick made some attempt to bear the strain with the fortitude of a martyr to science; but the unhappy Stetzle displayed no such courage—he had a wife and family, he said, and he wanted to get out. Mr. Fosdick counseled the vice-president to have his family brought in, but to this suggestion Stetzle only replied with curses. In calmer moments Stetzle said that with two men and twenty cats in the bin there could be no room for Mrs. Stetzle and nine children.

THE next afternoon Prof. Snooks from a safe distance shouted to them that they might, perhaps, regain their liberty by wearing rubber boots; but that they should try the idea on a cat first. In this suggestion Mr. Fosdick saw a ray of hope, and Mr. Stetzle was so cheered that he offered to dispose of his stock in the company of Mr. Fosdick for a mere song. The offer was refused. Mr. Fosdick said that he was not interested particularly in financial matters at that time. He wrote a note to Josh Little, the harness-maker, ordering a pair of rubber boots made, cat-size. Then

the inventor by eloquent gestures attracted the attention of the crowd and threw the note towards it at which there was a great scattering. A moment later he sank back in despair, for just as the epistle touched the ground there was a slight explosion, a vivid red flash, and it burned up before his very eyes. Well might he shudder, for now he realized the tremendous electrical pressure with which he was charged.

A bolt of sheet rubber was passed in the next morning, however, and Fosdick set to work fashioning some insulating shoes for John L. These were completed by noon and the fifty thousand morbid spectators that had come in by special trains breathlessly watched the experiment. Rubber-shod, the cat was dropped to the ground—and it survived. A great cheer went up from the crowd. This had no sooner subsided than Prof. Snooks realized that a terrible mistake had been made. Hastily grabbing a megaphone from a barker of one of the numerous side shows that had set up their tents everywhere, he addressed the crowd. He told them that John L. was at liberty charged with perhaps a hundred million volts of electricity, and that contact with him could mean but one thing—death. Instantly there was a wild commotion in the terrorized crowd and then a wild flight from the awful peril. By nightfall the railroads had deported thirty-nine train loads of people and, save for the few that could find rubber boots, the streets of Whiffleville were as lifeless as the shady paths of the neighboring cemetery.

Rubber and rubber alone could protect them against the deadly menace of John L. This, all realized. A thoughtless humanitarian, Bill Hitchcock by the name, made rubber boots for his three dogs. One of the dogs that very afternoon, spying John L., set sail for him and although he managed only to touch the tail of the cat he became charged with the deadly electrical pressure. And worse, the dog coming home rubbed noses with Hitchcock's other two dogs, charging them. With three electrical dogs and one electrical cat at large only the foolhardy ventured abroad.

WITHIN the next twenty-four hours there were a number of casualties. About nine in the evening Old Tige, the largest of the dogs, came in contact with a lamp post. The post was instantly fused off even with the ground and the gas became ignited, making a geyser of flame that shot a hundred feet heavenward. The dog died. Later in the night another one of the dogs ran against a barbed wire fence, killing ten head of stock four miles away. That dog also died. At daybreak there was a loud explosion in the outskirts of the town. It is thought that this came from a cat fight in which John L. participated. At any rate he has never been seen since and to-day only a pathetic hole in the ground marks his probable last battlefield.

The remaining dog was captured at great peril to life, and turned over to Prof. Snooks for experimental purposes. By gradually drawing off the electrical charge by means of a condenser, the Professor in a week's time reduced the dog's pressure to approximately five thousand volts and then the animal was further discharged by hooking him up to the town arc light system of fifty lamps which he maintained in the splendid effulgence of over two thousand candle power for a period of nine hours and eleven minutes before his power ran down.

Mr. Fosdick and Mr. Stetzle are now living on two insulated stools in the laboratory of Doolittle College. Their potential is dropping at the rate of ten volts a day, and Prof. Snooks has calculated that they must remain there for the next 957 years, three months and two days before being fully discharged. It seems a great pity.

UNDER *the* KNIFE

By H.G. Wells

Author of "The First Men in the Moon," "The Star," etc.



...Flashing suddenly out of the darkness there came a flying multitude of particles of rock, glittering like dust-specks in a sunbeam... and then I saw a bright spot of light, that shone a little to one side of my path, growing very rapidly larger, and perceived that it was the planet Saturn rushing toward me.



WHAT if I die under it?" The thought recurred again and again, as I walked home from Haddon's. It was a purely personal question. I was spared the deep anxieties of a married man, and I knew there were few of my intimate friends but would find my death troublesome chiefly on account of their duty of regret. I was surprised indeed, and perhaps a little humiliated, as I turned the matter over, to think how few could possibly exceed the conventional requirement. Things came before me stripped of glamour, in a clear dry light, during that walk from Haddon's house over Primrose Hill. There were the friends of my youth; I perceived now that our affection was a tradition, which we foregathered rather laboriously to maintain. There were the rivals and helpers of my later career: I suppose I had been cold-blooded and undemonstrative—one perhaps implies the other. It may be that even the capacity for friendship is a question of physique. There had been a time in my own life when I had grieved bitterly enough at the loss of a friend; but as I walked home that afternoon the emotional side of my imagination was dormant. I could not pity myself, nor feel sorry for my friends, nor conceive of them as grieving for me.

I was interested in this deadness of my emotional nature—no doubt a concomitant of my stagnating physiology; and my thoughts wandered off along the line it suggested. Once before, in my hot youth, I had suffered a sudden loss of blood, and had been within an ace of death. I remembered now that my affections as well as my passions had drained out of me, leaving scarce anything but a tranquil resignation, a dreg of self-pity. It had been weeks before the old ambitions and tendernesses and all the complex moral interplay of a man had reasserted themselves. It occurred to me that the real meaning of this numbness might be a gradual slipping away from the pleasure-pain guidance of the animal man. It has been proven, I take it, as thoroughly as anything can be proven in this world, that the higher emotions, the moral feelings, even the subtle unselfishness of love, are evolved from the elemental desires and fears of the simple animal: they are the harness in which man's mental freedom goes. And it may be that as death overshadows us, as our possibility of acting diminishes, this complex growth of balanced impulse, propensity and aversion, whose interplay inspires our acts, goes with it. Leaving what?

I was suddenly brought back to reality by an imminent collision with the butcher's-boy tray. I found that I was crossing the bridge over the Regent's Park Canal, which runs parallel with that in the Zoological Gardens. The boy in blue had been looking over his shoulder at a black barge advancing slowly, towed by a gaunt white horse. In the Gardens a nurse was leading three happy little children over the bridge. The trees were bright green; the spring hopefulness was still unstained by the dust of summer; the sky in the water was bright and clear, but broken by long waves, by quivering bands of black, as the barge drove through. The breeze was stirring; but it did not stir me as the spring breeze used to do.

Was this dullness of feeling in itself an anticipation? It was curious that I could reason and follow out a network of suggestion as clearly as ever; so, at least, it seemed to me. It was calmness rather than dullness that was com-

ing upon me. Was there any ground for the belief in the presentiment of death? Did a man near death begin instinctively to withdraw himself from the meshes of matter and sense, even before the cold hand was laid upon his? I felt strangely isolated—isolated without regret—from the life and existence about me. The children playing in the sun and gathering strength and experience for the business of life, the park-keeper gossiping with a nursemaid, the nursing mother, the young couple intent upon each other as they passed me, the trees by the wayside spreading new pleading leaves to the sunlight, the stir in their branches—I had been part of it all, but I had nearly done with it now.

Some way down the Broad Walk I perceived that I was tired, and that my feet were heavy. It was hot that afternoon, and I turned aside and sat down on one of the green chairs that line the way. In a minute I had dozed into a dream, and the tide of my thoughts washed up a vision of the resurrection. I was still sitting in the chair, but I thought myself actually dead, withered, tattered, dried, one eye (I saw) pecked out by birds. "Awake!" cried a voice; and incontinently the dust of the path and the mould under the grass became insurgent. I had never before thought of Regent's Park as a cemetery, but now, through the trees, stretching as far as eye could see, I beheld a flat plain of writhing graves and heeling tombstones. There seemed to be some trouble; the rising dead appeared to stifle as they struggled upward, they bled in their struggles, the red flesh was torn away from the white bones. "Awake!" cried a voice; but I determined I would not rise to such horrors. "Awake!" They would not let me alone. "Wake up!" said an angry voice. A cockney angel! The man who sells the tickets was shaking me, demanding my penny.

I paid my penny, pocketed my ticket, yawned, stretched my legs, and, feeling now rather less torpid, got up and walked on towards Langham Place. I speedily lost myself again in a shifting maze of thoughts about death. Going across Marylebone Road into that crescent at the end of Langham Place, I had the narrowest escape from the shaft of a cab, and went on my way with a palpitating heart and a bruised shoulder. It struck me that it would have been curious if my meditations on my death on the morrow had led to my death that day.

BUT I will not weary you with more of my experiences that day and the next. I knew more and more certainly

that I should die under the operation; at times I think I was inclined to pose to myself. The doctors were coming at eleven, and I did not get up. It seemed scarce worth while to trouble about washing and dressing, and though I read my newspapers and the letters that came by the first post, I did not find them very interesting. There was a friendly note from Addison, my old school-friend, calling my attention to two discrepancies and a

printer's error in my new book, with one from Langridge venting some vexation over Milton. The rest were business communications. I brokefasted in bed. The glow of pain at my side seemed more massive. I knew it was pain, and yet, if you can understand, I did not find it very painful. I had lain thinking of things that were past; in the morning I dozed over the question of immortality. Haddon came, punctuated to the minute with a black bag; and Mowbray soon followed. Their arrival stirred me up a little. I began to take a more personal interest in the

***T**HE master of scientifiction has written a remarkable tale, and although the title may scare you at first, the story is not of the horror type at all. Quite the contrary. Wells knows his P's and Q's and in this story particularly you will find nothing to complain about. Other authors would, perhaps, foist a real horror tale upon you, but Wells, as usual, handles his material in a masterful manner. Have you ever undergone an operation? If you have, then perhaps you will appreciate more than other readers this fascinating tale.*

proceedings. Haddon moved the little octagonal table close to the bedside, and, with his broad back to me, began taking things out of his bag. I heard the light click of steel upon steel. My imagination, I found, was not altogether stagnant. "Will you hurt me much?" I said in an off-hand tone.

"Not a bit," Haddon answered over his shoulder. "We shall chloroform you. Your heart's as sound as a bell." And as he spoke, I had a whiff of the pungent sweetness of the anæsthetic.

They stretched me out, with a convenient exposure of my side, and, almost before I realized what was happening, the chloroform was being administered. It stings the nostrils, and there is a suffocating sensation at first. I knew I should die—that this was the end of consciousness for me. And suddenly I felt that I was not prepared for death: I had a vague sense of duty overlooked—I knew not what. What was it I had not done? I could think of nothing more to do, nothing desirable left in life; and yet I had the strangest disinclination to death. And the physical sensation was painfully oppressive. Of course the doctors did not know that they were going to kill me. Possibly I struggled. Then I fell motionless, and a great silence, a monstrous silence, and an impenetrable blackness came upon me.

There must have been an interval of absolute unconsciousness, seconds or minutes. Then with a chilly, unemotional clearness, I perceived that I was not yet dead. I was still in my body; but all the multitudinous sensations that came sweeping from it to make up the background of consciousness had gone, leaving me free of it all. No, not free of it all; for as yet something still held me to the poor stark flesh upon the bed—held me, yet not so closely that I did not feel myself external to it, independent of it, straining away from it. I do not think I saw, I do not think I heard; but I perceived all that was going on, and it was as if I both heard and saw. Haddon was bending over me, Mowbray behind me; the scalpel—it was a large scalpel—was cutting my flesh at the side under the flying ribs. It was interesting to see myself cut like cheese, without a pang, without even a qualm. The interest was much of a quality with that one might feel in a game of chess between strangers. Haddon's face was firm and his hand steady; but I was surprised to perceive (*how* I know not) that he was feeling the gravest doubt as to his own wisdom in the conduct of the operation.

Mowbray's thoughts, too, I could see. He was thinking that Haddon's manner showed too much of the specialist. New suggestions came up like bubbles through a stream of frothing meditation, and burst one after another in the little bright spot of his consciousness. He could not help noticing and admiring Haddon's swift dexterity, in spite of his envious quality and his disposition to detract. I saw my liver exposed. I was puzzled at my own condition. I did not feel that I was dead, but I was different in some way from my living self. The gray depression, that had weighed on me for a year or more and colored all my thoughts, was gone. I perceived and thought without any emotional tint at all. I wondered if every one perceived things in this way under chloroform, and forgot it again when he came out of it. It would be inconvenient to look into some heads, and not forget.

Although I did not think I was dead, I still perceived quite clearly that I was soon to die. This brought me back to the considerations of Haddon's proceedings. I looked into his mind, and saw that he was afraid of cutting a branch of the portal vein. My attention was distracted from details by the curious changes going on in his mind. His consciousness was like the quivering little spot of light which is thrown by the mirror of a galvanometer. His thoughts ran under it like a stream, some through the focus

bright and distinct, some shadowy in the half light of the edge. Just now the little glow was steady; but the least movement on Mowbray's part, the slightest sound from outside, even the faint difference in the slow movement of the living flesh he was cutting, set the light-spot shivering and spinning. A new sense-impression came rushing up through the flow of thoughts; and lo! the light-spot jerked away towards it, swifter than a frightened fish. It was wonderful to think that upon that unstable, fitful thing depended all the complex emotions of the man; that for the next five minutes, therefore, my life hung upon its movements. And he was growing more and more nervous in his work. It was as if a little picture of a cut vein grew brighter, and struggled to oust from his brain another picture of a cut falling short of the mark. He was afraid: his dread of cutting too little was battling with his dread of cutting too far.

THEN, suddenly, like an escape of water from under a lock-gate, a great uprush of horrible realization set all his thoughts swirling, and simultaneously I perceived that the vein was cut. He started back with a hoarse exclamation, and I saw the brown-purple blood gather in a swift bead, and run trickling. He was horrified. He pitched the red-stained scalpel on to the octagonal table; and instantly both doctors flung themselves upon me, making hasty and ill-conceived efforts to remedy the disaster. "Ice!" said Mowbray, gasping. But I knew that I was killed, though my body still clung to me.

I will not describe their belated endeavors to save me, though I perceived every detail. My perceptions were sharper and swifter than they had ever been in life; my thoughts rushed through my mind with incredible swiftness, but with perfect definition. I can only compare their crowded clarity to the effects of a reasonable dose of opium. In a moment it would be all over, and I should be free. I knew I was immortal, what would happen I did not know. Should I drift off presently, like a puff of smoke from a gun, in some kind of half material body, an attenuated version of my material self? Should I find myself suddenly among the innumerable hosts of the dead, and know the world about me for the phantasmagoria it had always seemed? Should I drift to some spiritualistic *séance*, and there make foolish, incomprehensible attempts to affect a purblind medium? It was a state of unemotional curiosity, of colorless expectation. And then I realized a growing stress upon me, a feeling as though some huge human magnet was drawing me upward out of my body. The stress grew and grew. I seemed an atom for which monstrous forces were fighting. For one brief, terrible moment sensation came back to me. That feeling of falling headlong which comes in nightmares, that feeling a thousand times intensified, that and a black horror swept across my thoughts in a torrent. Then the two doctors, the naked body with its cut outside, the little room, swept away from under me and vanished, as a speck of foam vanishes down an eddy.

I was in mid-air. Far below was the West End of London, receding rapidly—for I seemed to be flying swiftly upward—and as it receded, passing westward like a panorama. I could see, through the faint gaze of smoke, the innumerable roofs chimney-set, the narrow roadways, stippled with people and conveyances, the little specks of squares, and the church steeples like thorns sticking out of the fabric. But it spun away as the earth rotated on its axis, and in a few seconds (as it seemed) I was over the scattered clumps of town about Ealing, the little Thames a thread of blue to the south, and the Chiltern Hills and the North Downs, coming up like the rim of a basin, far away and faint with haze. Up I rushed. And at first I had not the faintest conception what this headlong rush upward could mean.

Every moment the circle of scenery beneath me grew wider, and the details of town and field, of hill and valley, got more and more hazy and pale and indistinct, a luminous gray was mingled more and more with the blue of the hills and the green of the open meadows; and a little patch of cloud, low and far to the west, shone ever more dazzlingly white. Above, as the veil of atmosphere between myself and outer space grew thinner, the sky, which had been a springtime blue at first, grew deeper and richer in color, passing steadily through the intervening shades, until presently it was as dark as the blue sky of midnight, and presently as black as the blackness of a frosty starlight, and at last as black as no blackness I had ever beheld. And first one star, and then many, and at last an innumerable host broke out upon the sky; more stars than any one has ever seen from the face of the earth. For the blueness of the sky is the light of the sun and stars sifted and spread abroad blindly; there is diffused light even in the darkest skies of winter, and we do not see the stars by day only because of the dazzling irradiation of the sun. But now I saw things—I know not how; assuredly with no mortal eyes—and that defect of bedazzlement blinded me no longer. The sun was incredibly strange and wonderful. The body of it was a disc of blinding white light; not yellowish, as it seems to those who live upon the earth, but livid white, all streaked with scarlet streaks and rimmed about with a fringe of writhing tongues of red fire. And shooting halfway across the heavens from either side of it and brighter than the Milky Way, were two pinions of silver white, making it look more like those winged globes I have seen in Egyptian sculpture than anything else I can remember upon earth. These I knew for the solar corona, though I had never seen anything of it but a picture during the days of my earthly life.

When my attention came back to the earth again, I saw that it had fallen very far away from me. Field and town were long since undistinguishable, and all the varied hues of the country were merging into a uniform bright gray, broken only by the brilliant white of the clouds that lay scattered in flocculent masses over Ireland and the West of England. For now I could see the outlines of the north of France and Ireland, and all this Island of Britain, save where Scotland passed over the horizon to the north, or where the coast was blurred or obliterated by cloud. The sea was a dull gray and darker than the land; and the whole panorama was rotating slowly towards the east.

ALL this had happened so swiftly that until I was some one thousand miles or so from the earth I had no thought for myself. But now I perceived I had neither hands nor feet, neither parts nor organs, and that I felt neither alarm nor pain. All about me I perceived that the vacancy (for I had already left the air behind) was cold beyond the imagination of man; but it troubled me not. The sun's rays shot through the void, powerless to light or heat until they should strike on matter in their course. I saw things with a serene self-forgetfulness, even as if I were God. And down below there, rushing away from me—countless miles in a second—where a little dark spot on the gray marked the position of London, two doctors were struggling to restore life to the poor hacked and outworn shell I had abandoned. I felt then such release, such serenity as I can compare to no mortal delight I have ever known.

It was only after I had perceived all these things that the meaning of that headlong rush of the earth grew into comprehension. Yet it was so simple, so obvious, that I was amazed at my never anticipating the thing that was happening to me. I had suddenly been cut adrift from matter: all that was material of me was there upon earth, whirling away through space, held to the earth by gravita-

tion, partaking of the earth-inertia, moving in its wreath of epicycles round the sun, and with the sun and the planets on their vast march through space. I was not leaving the earth; the earth was leaving *me*, and not only the earth but the whole solar system was streaming past. And about me in space, invisible to me, scattered in the wake of the earth upon its journey, there must be an innumerable multitude of souls, stripped like myself of the material, stripped like myself of the passions of the individual and the generous emotions of the gregarious brute, naked intelligences, things of new-born wonder and thought, marvelling at the strange release that had suddenly come to them!

As I receded faster and faster from the strange white sun in the black heavens, and from the broad and shining earth upon which my being had begun, I seemed to grow in some incredible manner vast: vast as regards this world I had left, vast as regards the moments and periods of human life. Very soon I saw the whole circle of the earth, slightly gibbous, like the moon when she nears her full, but very large; and the silvery shape of America was now in the noonday blaze wherein (as it seemed) little England had been basking but a few minutes ago. At first the earth was large; and shone in the heavens, filling a great part of them; but every moment she grew smaller and more distant. As she shrank, the broad moon in its third quarter crept into view over the rim of her disc. I looked for the constellations. Only that part of Aries directly behind the sun and the Lion, which the earth covered were hidden. I recognized the tortuous, tattered band of the Milky Way with Vega very bright between sun and earth; and Sirius and Orion shone splendid against the unfathomable blackness in the opposite quarter of the heavens. The Pole Star was overhead, and the Great Bear hung over the circle of the earth. And away beneath and beyond the corona of the sun were strange groupings of stars I had never seen in my life—notably a dagger-shaped group that I knew for the Southern Cross. All these were no larger than when they had shone on earth, but the little stars that one scarce sees shone now against the setting of black vacancy as brightly as the first-magnitudes had done, while the larger worlds were points of indescribable glory and color. Aldebaran was a spot of blood-red fire, and Sirius condensed to one point the light of innumerable sapphires. And they shone steadily: they did not scintillate, they were calmly glorious. My impressions had an adamant hardness and brightness: there was no blurring softness, no atmosphere, nothing but infinite darkness set with the myriads of these acute and brilliant points and specks of light. Presently when I looked again, the little earth seemed no bigger than the sun, and it dwindled and turned as I looked, until in a second's space (as it seemed to me), it was halved; and so it went on swiftly dwindling. Far away in the opposite direction, a little pinkish pin's head of light, shining steadily, was the planet Mars. I swam motionless in vacancy, and, without a trace of terror or astonishment, watched the speck of cosmic dust we call the world fall away from me.

Presently it dawned upon me that my sense of duration had changed; that my mind was moving not faster but infinitely slower, that between each separate impression there was a period of many days. The moon spun once round the earth as I noted this; and I perceived clearly the motion of Mars in his orbit. Moreover, it appeared as if the time between thought and thought grew steadily greater, until at last a thousand years was but a moment in my perception.

AT first the constellations had shone motionless against the black background of infinite space; but presently it seemed as though the group of stars about Hercules and the Scorpion was contracting, while Orion and Aldebaran and their neighbors were scattering apart. Flashing sud-

denly out of the darkness there came a flying multitude of particles of rock, glittering like dust-specks in a sun-beam, and encompassed in a faintly luminous cloud. They swirled about me, and vanished again in a twinkling far behind. And then I saw that a bright spot of light, that shone a little to one side of my path, was growing very rapidly larger, and perceived that it was the planet Saturn rushing towards me. Larger and larger it grew, swallowing up the heavens behind it, and hiding every moment a fresh multitude of stars. I perceived its flattened, whirling body, its disc-like belt, and seven of its little satellites. It grew and grew, till it towered enormous, and then I plunged amid a streaming multitude of clashing stones, and dancing dust-particles and gas-eddies, and saw for a moment the mighty triple belt like three concentric arches of moonlight above me, its shadow black on the boiling tumult below. These things happened in one-tenth of the time it takes to tell them. The planet went by like a flash of lightning; for a few seconds it blotted out the sun, and there and then became a mere black, dwindling, winged patch against the light. The earth I could no longer see.

With a stately swiftness, in the profoundest silence the solar system fell from me as if it had been a garment, until the sun was a mere star amid the multitude of stars, with its eddy of planet-specks lost in the confused glittering of the remoter light. I was no longer a denizen of the solar system: I had come to the outer Universe, I seemed to grasp and comprehend the whole world of matter. Ever more swiftly the stars closed in about the spot where Antares and Vega had vanished in a phosphorescent haze, until that part of the sky had the semblance of a whirling mass of nebulae, and ever before me yawned vaster gaps of vacant blackness, and the stars shone fewer and fewer. It seemed as if I moved towards a point between Orion's belt and sword; and the void about that region opened vaster and vaster every second, an incredible gulf of nothingness into which I was falling. Faster and ever faster the universe rushed by, a hurry of whirling motes at last, speeding silently into the void. Stars glowing brighter and brighter, with their circling planets catching the light in a ghostly fashion as I neared them, shone out and vanished again into inexistence; faint comets, clusters of meteorites, twinkling specks of matter, eddying light-points, whizzed past, some perhaps a hundred millions of miles or so from me at most, few nearer, traveling with unimaginable rapidity, shooting constellations, momentary darts of fire, through that black, enormous night. More than anything else it was like a dusty draught, sunbeam-lit. Broader and wider and deeper grew the starless space, the vacant Beyond, into which I was being drawn. At last a quarter of the heavens was black and blank, and the whole headlong rush of stellar universe closed in behind me like a veil of light that is gathered together. It drove away from me like a monstrous jack-o'-lantern driven by the wind. I had come out into the wilderness of space. Ever the vacant blackness grew broader, until the hosts of the stars seemed only like a swarm of fiery specks hurrying away from me, inconceivably remote, and the darkness, the nothingness and emptiness, were about me on every side. Soon the little universe of matter, the cage of points in which I had begun to be, was dwindling, now to a whirling disc of luminous glittering, and now to one minute disc of hazy light. In a little while it would shrink to a point, and at last would vanish.

Suddenly feeling came back to me—feeling in the shape of overwhelming terror; such a dread of those dark vastitudes as no words can describe, a passionate resurgence of sympathy and social desire. Were these other souls, invisible to me as I to them, about me in the blackness? or was I indeed, even as I felt, alone? Had I passed out of being into something that was neither being nor not-being? The covering of the body, the covering of matter, had been

torn from me, and the hallucinations of companionship and security. Everything was black and silent. I had ceased to be. I was nothing. There was nothing, save only that infinitesimal dot of light that dwindled in the gulf. I strained myself to hear and see, and for a while there was naught but infinite silence, intolerable darkness, horror, and despair.

Then I saw that about the spot of light into which the whole world of matter had shrunk there was a faint glow. And in a band on either side of it the darkness was not absolute. I watched it for ages, as it seemed to me, and through the long waiting the haze grew imperceptibly more distinct. And then about the band appeared an irregular cloud of the faintest, palest brown. I felt a passionate impatience; but the things grew brighter so slowly that they scarce seemed to change. What was unfolding itself? What was this strange reddish dawn in the interminable night of space?

THE cloud's shape was grotesque. It seemed to be looped along its lower side into four projecting masses, and, above, it ended in a straight line. What phantom was it? I felt assured I had seen that figure before; but I could not think what, nor where, nor when it was. Then the realization rushed upon me. *It was a clenched Hand.* I was alone in space, alone with this huge, shadowy Hand, upon which the whole Universe of Matter lay like an unconsidered speck of dust. It seemed as though I watched it through vast periods of time. On the forefinger glittered a ring; and the universe from which I had come was but a spot of light upon the ring's curvature. And the thing that the hand gripped had the likeness of a black rod. Through a long eternity I watched this Hand, with the ring and the rod, marveling and fearing and waiting helplessly on what might follow. It seemed as though nothing could follow: that I should watch forever, seeing only the Hand and the thing it held, and understanding nothing of its import. Was the whole universe but a refraction speck upon some greater Being? Were our worlds but the atoms of another universe? And what was I? Was I indeed immaterial? A vague persuasion of a body gathering about me came into my suspense. The abysmal darkness about the Hand filled with impalpable suggestions, with uncertain, fluctuating shapes.

Then, suddenly, came a sound, like the sound of a tolling bell: faint, as if infinitely far; muffled, as though heard through thick swathings of darkness: a deep, vibrating resonance, with vast gulfs of silence between each stroke. And the hand appeared to tighten on the rod. And I saw far above the Hand, towards the apex of the darkness, a circle of dim phosphorescence, a ghostly sphere whence these sounds came throbbing; and at the last stroke the Hand vanished, for the hour had come, and I heard a noise of many waters. But the black rod remained as a great band across the sky. And then a voice, which seemed to run to the uttermost parts of space, spoke, saying, "There will be no more pain."

At that an almost intolerable gladness and radiance rushed upon me, and I saw the circle shining white and bright, and the rod shining and black and many things else distinct and clear. And the circle was the face of the clock, and the rod the rail of my bed. Haddon was standing at the foot, against the rail, with a small pair of scissors on his fingers; and the hands of my clock on the mantel over his shoulder were clasped together over the hour of twelve. Mowbray was washing something in a basin at the octagonal table, and at my side I felt a subdued feeling that could scarce be spoken of as pain.

The operation had not killed me. And I perceived, suddenly, that the dull melancholy of half a year was lifted from my mind.

THE END.

and always—a climb up and up along infinite distances of steps that led from a lost Abaddon to a paradise of the blue sky and open world!

"At last a consciousness of clear sky close above me, the lip of the pit before me. Memory of passing between the great portals of the pit and of steady withdrawal from it. Dreams of giant men with strange, peaked crowns and veiled faces who pushed me onward and onward and onward, and held back pulsing globules of light that sought to draw me back to a gulf wherein planets swam between the branches of red trees that had snakes for crowns.

"And then a long, long sleep—how long God alone knows—in a cleft of rocks; an awakening to see far in the north the beam still rising and falling, the lights still hunting, the whispering high above me calling—and knowledge that no longer had they power to draw me.

"Again crawling on dead arms and legs that moved—that moved—like the Ancient Mariner's ship—without vol-

ition of mine. And then—your fire—and this—safety."

The crawling man smiled at us for a moment, then quickly fell asleep.

That afternoon we struck camp, and, carrying the crawling man, started back south. For three days we carried him, and still he slept. And on the third day, still sleeping, he died. We built a great pile of wood and we burned his body, as he had asked. We scattered his ashes about the forest with the ashes of the trees that had consumed his.

It must be a great magic, indeed, that can disentangle those ashes and draw them back in a rushing cloud to the pit he called accursed. I do not think that even the people of the pit have such a spell. No.

But Anderson and I did not return to the five peaks to see. And if the gold does stream out between the five peaks of the Hand Mountain, like putty from a clenched fist—there it may remain for all of us.

THE END

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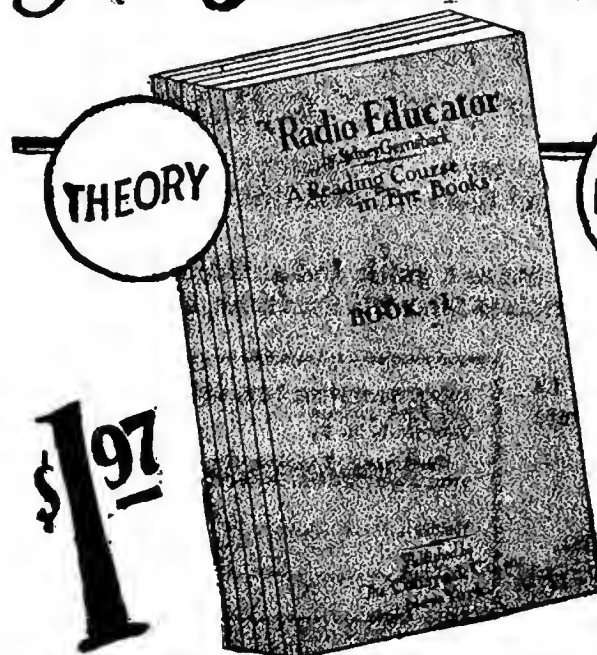
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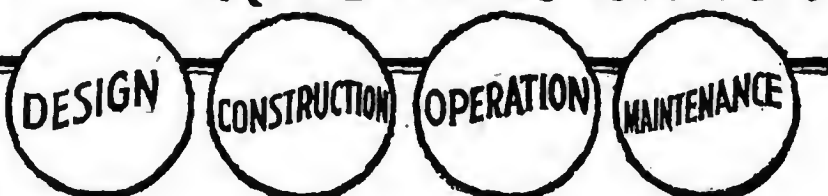
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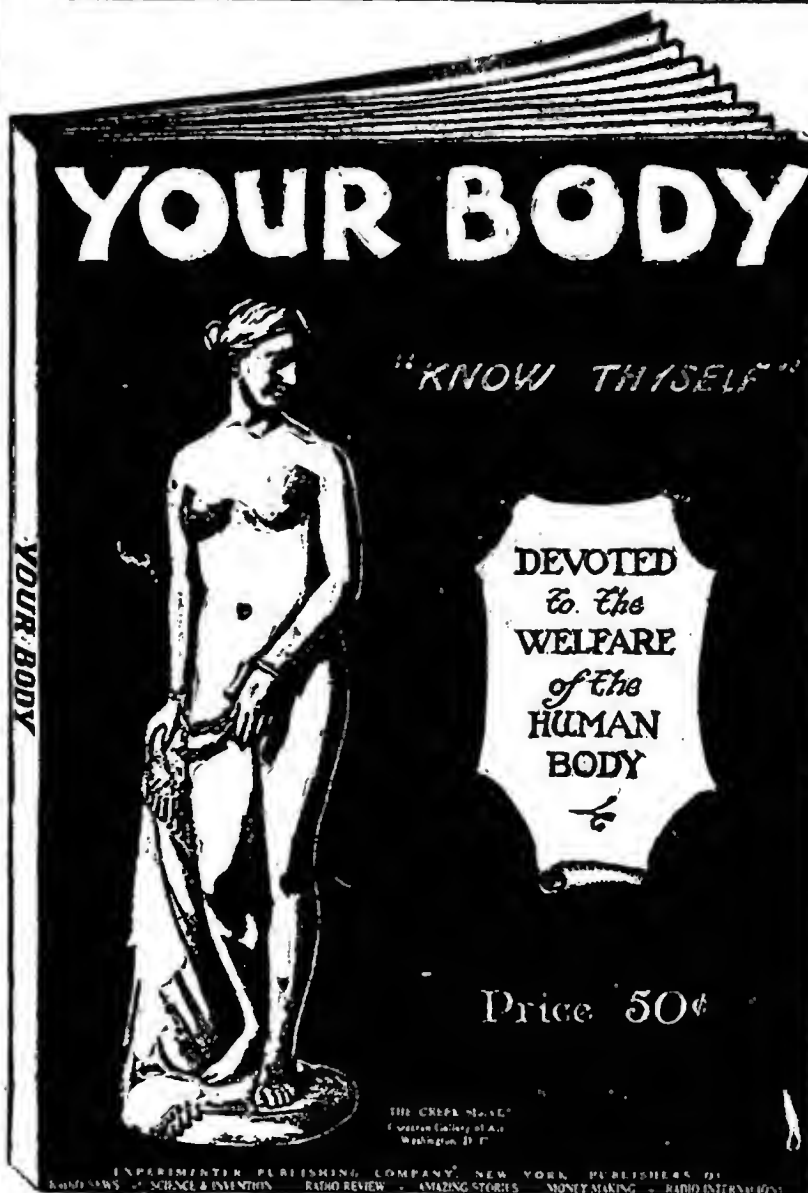
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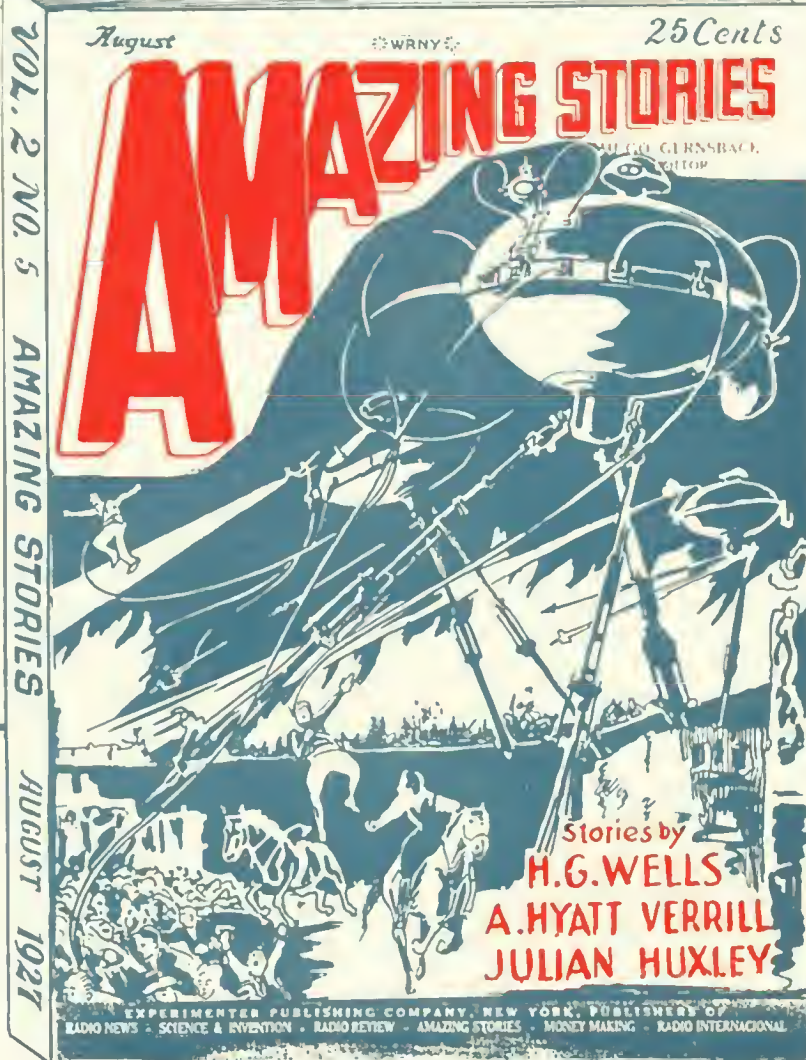
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